OUR FRANK:

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

AMY WALTON.

ILLUSTRATED.

LONDON:
BLACKIE & SON, 49 & 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.;
GLASGOW, EDINBURGH, AND DUBLIN
1887.

CONTENTS.

	Page
OUR FRANK, ...	7
FAITHFUL MOSES, ...	77
LIKE A BEAN-STALK, ...	101
ALL ALONE!	119
PENELOPE'S NEEDLEWORK, ...	131
THE BLACK PIGS: A TRUE STORY, . .	145

ROGER WATCHING BY LITTLE GABRIEL.

OUR FRANK:

A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE STORY.

"From east to west,
At home is best."—*German Proverb.*

CHAPTER I.

IT was a mild spring evening, and Mrs. Frank Darvell was toiling slowly up Whiteleaf Hill on her way back from market. She had walked every step of the way there to sell her ducklings, and now the basket on her arm was heavy with the weight of various small grocery packets. Up till now she had not felt so tired, partly because she had been walking along the level high-road, and partly because the way had been beguiled by the chat of a friend; but after she had said good-night to her crony at the beginning of the village, and turned up the steep chalky road which led to the

hills, her fatigue increased with every step, and the basket seemed heavier than ever. It was a very lonely mile she had to go before reaching home; up and up wound the rough white road, and then gave a sudden turn and ran along level a little while with dark woods on either side. Then up again, steeper than ever, till you reached the top of the hill, and on one side saw the plain beneath, dotted over with villages and church spires, and on the other hand wide sloping beech woods, which were just now delicately green with their young spring leaves.

Mrs. Darvell set her basket down on the ground when she reached this point, and drew a long breath; the worst of the walk was over now, and she thought with relief how good it would be to pull off her boots, and hoped that Frank had not forgotten to have the kettle on for tea. She presently trudged on again with renewed spirits, and in ten minutes more the faint blue smoke from a chimney caught her eye; that was neighbour Gunn's cottage, and their own was close by. "And right thankful I be," said Mrs. Darvell to herself as she unlatched the little garden gate.

The cottage was one of a small lonely cluster standing on the edge of an enormous beech wood. Not so very long ago the wood had covered the whole place; but gradually a clearing had been made, the ground cultivated, and a little settlement had sprung up, which was known as "Green Highlands." It belonged to the parish of Danecross, a village in the plain below, three good miles away; so that for church, school, and public-house the people had to descend the long hill up which Mrs. Darvell had just struggled. Shops there were none, even in Danecross, and for these they had to go a mile further, to the market-town of Daylesbury. But all this was not such a hardship to the people of Green Highlands as might be supposed, and many of them would not have changed their cottage on the hill for one in the village on the plain; for the air of Green Highlands was good, the children "fierce," which in those parts means healthy and strong, and everyone possessed a piece of garden big enough to grow vegetables and accommodate a family pig.

So the people, though poor, were contented, and had a more prosperous well-to-do air than

some of the Danecross folk, who received higher wages and lived in the valley.

The room Mrs. Frank Darvell entered with a heavy, tired tread was a good-sized kitchen, one end of which was entirely occupied by a huge open fireplace without any grate; on the hearth burned and crackled a bright little wood fire, the flames of which played merrily round a big black kettle hung on a chain. A little checked curtain hung from the mantel-shelf to keep away the draught which rushed down the wide open chimney, on each side of which was a straight-backed wooden settle. The dark smoke-dried rafters were evidently used as larder and store-house, for all manner of things hung from them, such as a side of bacon, tallow dips, and a pair of clogs. Two or three pieces of oak furniture, brought to a high state of polish by Mrs. Darvell's industrious hands, gave an air of comfort to the room, though the floor was red brick and bare of carpet; a tall brazen-faced clock ticked deliberately behind the door. On one of the settles in the chimney-corner sat Mrs. Darvell's "man," as she called her husband, smoking a short pipe, with his feet stretched out on the hearth; his

great boots, caked with mud, stood beside him. He was a big broad-shouldered fellow, about forty, with a fair smooth face, which generally looked good-tempered enough, and somewhat foolish, but which just now had a sullen expression on it, which Mrs. Darvell's quick eye noted immediately. He looked up and nodded when his wife came in, without taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Well, I'm proper tired," she said, bumping her basket down with a sigh of relief. "That Whiteleaf Hill do spend one so after a day's marketing." Then glancing at the muddy boots on the hearth: "Bin ploughin?"

Mr. Darvell nodded again, and looked inquiringly at his wife's basket. Answering this silent question she said:

"I sold 'em fairly well. Mrs. Reuben got more; but hers was fatter."

Mr. Darvell smoked on in silence, and his wife busied herself in preparing supper, consisting of cold bacon, bread, and tea without milk; it was not until they had both been seated at the meal for a little while that she set down her cup suddenly and exclaimed:

"Why, whatever's got our Frank? Isn't he home yet?"

Mr. Darvell's mouth was still occupied, not with his pipe, but with a thick hunch of bread, on which was laid an almost equally thick piece of fat bacon. Gazing at his wife across this barrier he nodded again, and presently murmured somewhat indistinctly:

"Ah, he came home with me."

"Then," repeated Mrs. Darvell, fixing her eyes sharply on him, "where *is* the lad?"

Mr. Darvell avoided his wife's gaze.

"How should I know where he is?" he answered sullenly. "I haven't seen him, not for these two hours. He's fooling round somewheres with the other lads."

"That's not like our Frank," said Mrs. Darvell, giving an anxious look round at the tall clock. "Why, it's gone eight," she went on. "What *can* have got him?"

Her eyes rested suspiciously on her husband, who shifted about uneasily.

"Can't you let the lad bide?" he said; "ye'll not rest till ye make him a greater ninny nor he is by natur. He might as well ha' bin

a gell, an better, for all the good he'll ever be."

"How did he tackle the ploughin'?" asked Mrs. Darvell, pausing in the act of setting aside Frank's supper on the dresser.

"Worser nor ever," replied her husband contemptuously. "He'll never be good for nowt, but to bide at home an' keep's hands clean. Why, look at Eli Redrup, not older nor our Frank, an' can do a man's work already."

"Eli Redrup!" exclaimed Mrs. Darvell in a shrill tone of disgust; "you'd never even our lad to a great fullish lout like Eli Redrup, with a head like a turmut! If Frank isn't just so fierce as some lads of his age, he's got more sense than most."

"I tell 'ee, he'll never be good for nowt," replied her husband doggedly, as he resumed his seat in the chimney-corner and lighted his pipe.

"Onless," he added after a moment's pause, "he comes to be a schoolmaster; and it haggles me to think that a boy of mine should take up a line like that."

Mrs. Darvell made no answer; but as she washed up the cups and plates she cast a curious

glance every now and then at her husband's silent figure, for she had a strong feeling that he knew more than he chose to tell about "our" Frank's absence.

"Our Frank" had more than once been the innocent cause of a serious difference of opinion between Mr. and Mrs. Darvell. He was their only child, and had inherited his father's fair skin and blue eyes, and his mother's quickness of apprehension; but here the likeness to his parents ended, for he had a sensitive nature and a delicate frame—things hitherto unknown in Green Highlands. This did not matter so much during his childhood, when he earned golden opinions from rector and schoolmaster in Danecross, as a fine scholar, and one of the best boys in the choir; but the time came when Frank was thirteen, when he had gone through all the "Standards," when he must leave school, and begin to work for his living. It was a hard apprenticeship, for something quite different from brain-work was needed now, and the boy struggled vainly against his physical weakness. It was a state of things so entirely incomprehensible to Mr. Darvell, that, as he expressed it, "it fairly

haggled him." Weakness and delicacy were conditions entirely unknown to him and all his other relations, and might, he thought, be avoided by everyone except very old people and women; so Frank must be hardened, and taught not to shirk his work.

The hardening process went on for some time, but not with a very satisfactory result, for added to his weakness the boy now showed an increasing terror of his father. He shrank from the hard words or the uplifted hand with an evident fear, which only strengthened Mr. Darvell's anger, for it mortified him still more to find his lad a coward as well as a bungler over his work.

Frank, on his side, found his life almost intolerable just now, and all his trembling efforts "to work like a man" seemed utterly useless, for he was crippled by fear as well as weakness. He could not take things like the other Green Highland lads of his age, who were tough of nerve and sinew, and thought nothing of cuffs on the head and abuse. It was all dreadful to him, and he suffered as much in apprehension as in the actual punishment when it came. Mingled with it all was a hot sense of injustice, for he tried to

do his best, and yet was always in disgrace and despair. Where was the use of having been such a good "scholard?" That seemed wasted now, for Frank's poor little brain felt so muddled after a day's field-work, and he was altogether so spent with utter weariness, that the only thing to do was to tumble into bed, and books were out of the question. He was being "hardened," as his father called it, but not in a desirable way; for while his body remained slender and weak as ever, his mind became daily more stupid and unintelligent.

Frank's only refuge in these hard times was his mother's love. That never failed him, for the very incapacity that so excited the wrath of his father only drew him more closely to Mrs. Darvell, and made her watchful to shield him, if possible, from harsh treatment. She was always ready to do battle for him, and her strong big husband quailed before the small determined mother when she had her boy's cause in hand. For Mrs. Darvell was gifted with a range of expression and a freedom of speech which had been denied to her "man," and he had learned to dread the times when the missus was put out, as

occasions when he stood defenceless before that deadly weapon—the tongue. He was dreading it now, although he sat so quietly smoking in the chimney-corner. The air had that vaguely uneasy feeling in it that precedes a storm. Presently there would be the first clap of thunder. The clock struck nine. No Frank. An unheard-of hour for any of the Green Highland folk to be out of their beds and awake. Mr. Darvell rose, stretched himself, glanced nervously at his wife, and suggested humbly:

"Shall us go to bed?"

"*You* may," she replied, "but I don't stir till I see the lad. If so be," she added, "you *can* go to sleep with an easy mind while the lad's still out, you'd better do it."

Her husband scratched his head thoughtfully, but made no answer; then Mrs. Darvell rose and stood in front of him, shaking a menacing finger.

"Frank Darvell," she said slowly and solemnly, "you've bin leatherin' that lad. Don't deny it, for I know it."

Mr. Darvell did not attempt to deny it. He only shuffled his feet a little.

"An now," continued his wife with increasing vehemence, "you've druv him at last to run away; don't deny it."

"He ain't run away," muttered Mr. Darvell. "He ain't got pluck enough to do that. He's a coward, that's what he is."

"Coward!" cried his wife, now fairly roused, and standing in an aggressive attitude. "It's you that are the coward, you great, hulking, stupid lout, to strike a weak boy half yer size. An to talk of goin to bed, an him wandering out there in the woods. My poor little gentle lad!"

She sank down on the settle and wrung her hands helplessly, but started up again the next minute with a sudden energy which seemed to petrify her husband.

"Put on your boots," she said, pointing to them; and as Mr. Darvell meekly obeyed she went on speaking quietly and rapidly. "Wake up Jack Gunn and send him down to Danecross. Tell him to ask at the rectory and at schoolmaster's if they've seen the lad. Take your lantern and go into the woods. There's gypsies camping out Hampden way; go there, and tell 'em to look out for him. Don't you dare to come

back without the lad. I'll stop here, and burn a light and keep his supper ready. Poor little lad, he'll be starved with hunger!"

But the night waned, and no tidings came of Frank. Jack Gunn came back from Danecross having learned nothing, and the poor mother's fears increased. The boy must be wandering in those weary woods, afraid to come home—or perhaps lost. Such a thing had been known before now; and as the first streaks of light appeared in the sky, and she saw the dim figure of her husband returning alone, Mrs. Darvell's courage quite forsook her.

"I shall never see him no more," she said to herself, and cried bitterly.

. . . .

And where was "our Frank" meanwhile?

At the moment when Mrs. Darvell began to climb Whiteleaf Hill with her heavy basket, Frank was lying at the foot of a big beech tree in the wood near his home; his face was buried in his hands, and every now and then sobs shook his little thin frame. For it had been a most unfortunate day for him; everything had gone

wrong, and by the time the evening came and work was over his father's wrath was high. Frank knew what to expect, and he also remembered that there would be no mother at home to shield him from punishment, so waiting a favourable moment he slipped off into the wood before he was missed. Then he flung himself on the ground and cried, because he felt so tired, and weak, and hopeless; and as he thought of his father's angry face and heavy uplifted hand he shivered with terror. How he longed for someone to comfort and speak kindly to him. Soon, he knew, his mother would be in from market; there would be a blazing fire at home, and supper, and a warm corner. Should he venture back? But then, morning would come again, and the hard work, and he would have to stumble along the sticky furrows all day, and there would be blows and threatenings to end with. No, he could not go back; it would be better even, he said to himself, to beg for his bread like the tramps he had seen sometimes in Danecross.

As he came to this conclusion he sat up, rubbed his eyes, and looked round him. It was about six o'clock, and already very dusk in the wood,

though the little dancing leaves of the beeches could not make much shadow yet, for it was only April; all round the boy rose the gray straight stems of the trees, and tufts of primroses shone out whitely here and there on the ground. It was perfectly still and silent, except that a cold little wind rustled the branches, and the birds were making a few last twittering notes before they went to sleep—"a harmony," as the country folks called it. Frank got up and hurried on, for he knew that directly mother returned search would be made for him. He must get a long way on before that, and hide somewhere for the night. That side of the wood near Green Highlands was quite familiar to him, and though there were no paths, and it all looked very much alike, he knew what direction to take for the hiding-place he had in view A town boy would soon have become confused, and perhaps have ended in finding himself at Green Highlands again, but Frank knew better than that, and he stumbled steadily along in his heavy boots, getting gradually and surely further away from home and deeper in the wood.

How quiet it was, and how fast the darkness

seemed to close round him! All the birds were silent soon, except that a jay sometimes startled him with its harsh sudden cry; once a rabbit rushed so quickly across his path that he almost fell on it. On and on he went at a steady jog-trot pace, looking neither to right nor left. Now, if you have ever been in a beech wood, you must remember that winter and summer the ground is covered with the old dead brown leaves that have fallen from the trees. So thick they lie, that in some places you can stand knee-deep in them, especially if there are any hollows into which they have been drifted by the wind; this particular wood was full of such hollows, some of them wide and long enough for a tall man to lie down in, and Frank knew exactly where to find them. Turning aside, therefore, at a certain clump of bushes there was the very thing he wanted—bed and hiding-place at once. It was a broad shallow pit or hollow filled quite up to the top with the red-brown beech leaves. He scooped out a place just large enough for himself, lay down in it, and carefully replaced the leaves up to his very chin. He even put a few lightly over his face, and when that was done no one would

have imagined that a boy or any other living thing was hidden there.

Then the solemn hours of darkness came silently on; all the creatures in the great wood slept, and even Frank in his strange leafy bed slept also, worn out with weariness.

About the middle of the night the breeze freshened a little, and the dry leaves stirred and rustled. The sounds mingled with the boy's dreams, and he thought he was lying in his attic at home, and that a mouse was running over his face; he felt its little tickling feet and its long tail quite plainly, and put up his hand to brush it away. Then he woke with a start. The chill wind blew in his face and sighed among the trees, and instead of the low attic beams there were waving branches over his head. He was not at home, but alone, quite alone in Whiteleaf Wood, with thick darkness all round him. Frank was frightened without knowing why; it was all so "unked," as he would have expressed it, and as he stared about with terrified eyes he seemed to see mysterious forms moving near. Then he looked up towards the sky; and there, through a space between the tops of the trees, was one

solitary beautiful star shining down upon him like a kind bright eye. It was a comfort to see it there, and by degrees, as he lay with his eyes fixed upon it, he forgot his fears a little, and began to think of other things. First there came into his head one line of a hymn which he had often sung in the choir at Danecross church:

"Brightest and best of the sons of the morning"

it began. From that he went on to consider what a long time it was since he had said his prayers, because he was always so sleepy and tired at night, and he thought he would say them now. But before he had finished them he fell into a quiet slumber, which lasted till morning, when the sun, peering through the trees, pointed suddenly down at his face with a fiery finger and woke him up.

CHAPTER II.

THE first thought that came into Frank's head was that he should not have to go to plough that day. The second was, that it was

breakfast time, that he was very hungry, and that he had nothing to eat. This was not so pleasant; but proceeding to "farm" his pockets, which in Buckinghamshire dialect means to rummage, he discovered a small piece of very hard bread. With this scanty meal he was obliged to be satisfied, and presently continued his journey in a tolerably cheerful frame of mind. Where he was going and how he was to earn his living he did not know; but on one subject he was quite resolved, he would not go back till he was too big and strong for father to "whop" him. It was hard to leave mother, and she would be sorry; but he thought he would manage somehow to write her a letter, and put a stamp upon it with the first penny he earned.

So reflecting, and varying the gravity of such thoughts by chasing the squirrels and the gray rabbits that scudded across his path, he journeyed on, and by degrees reached a part of the wood quite unknown to him. He began to wonder now what he should do if he did not soon come to a cottage or some place where he could ask for food, for it was many hours since he had

eaten, and he was faint with exhaustion. Never in his life had he felt so dreadfully hungry, and there were not even berries for him to eat at this time of the year. At last the craving became so hard to bear, and his head was so queer and giddy that he thought he must rest a little while. As far as he could judge by the sun it was about four o'clock, and he must be a long way from Green Highlands. He dropped down in a little crumpled heap at the foot of a tree, and shut his eyes—nothing seemed to matter much, not even his father's anger; nothing but this dreadful gnawing pain. The only other thing he was conscious of was a distant continuous sound like the sawing of wood. He did not take much notice of this at first, but by and by as it went on and on monotonously the idea shaped itself in his mind that where that noise was there must be people, whom he could ask for food, and he got up and staggered on again. As he went the sound got louder and louder, and he could also hear a voice singing. This encouraged him so much that he quickened his pace to a run, and soon came to a great clearing in the wood. And then he saw what had caused the noise.

Felled trees were lying about in the round open space, and there were great heaps of curly yellow shavings, and strange-looking smooth pieces of wood carefully arranged in piles. Two little sheds stood at some distance from each other, and in one of these sat a man turning a piece of wood in a rudely fashioned lathe; as he finished it he handed it to a boy kneeling at his feet, who supplied him with more wood, and sang at his work in a loud, clear voice. And then a still more interesting object caught Frank's eye, for in the middle of the clearing there burned and crackled a lively little wood-fire, and over it, hanging from a triangle of three sticks, was a smoky black kettle. It held tea, he felt sure, and near it were some tin mugs and some nice little bundles of something tied up in spotted handkerchiefs. It all suggested agreeable preparations for a meal, and he felt he must join it at any risk.

He stood timidly at the edge of the wood observing all this for a minute, and then, as no one noticed him, he slowly advanced till he was close to the man and boy; then they looked up and saw him.

A wayworn, weary little figure he was, with

a white face and mournful blue eyes; he had a shrinking, frightened air, like some hunted creature of the woods; and here and there the dry brown leaves had stuck to his clothes. Holding out his hand, and speaking in a low voice, for he felt ashamed of begging when it came to the point, he said:

"Please can yer give me a morsel of bread?"

The man, who had kind slow brown eyes and a very placid face, looked at him without speaking, and shook his head at the outstretched hand. But the boy answered with a wide-mouthed grin:

"He's hard o' hearin', my pardner is. He don't know what yer say."

He then rose, and going close to the man shouted shrilly in his ear:

"Little chap wants summat t' eat."

The man nodded.

"He's welcome to jine at tea," he said, "and he can work it out arterwards. Where dost come from?" to Frank.

Frank hesitated; then he thought of a village several miles beyond Danecross, and answered boldly, "Dinton."

"And where art goin'?"

"I'm seekin' work," said Frank.

These answers having been yelled into his ear by the boy, the man asked no further questions, though he gravely considered the stranger with his large quiet eyes. Shortly afterwards, having been joined by the mate who was sawing in the other shed, the company disposed themselves round the fire, and to Frank's great joy the meal began. And what a meal it was! Roasted potatoes, tea, thick hunches of bread, small fragments of fat bacon, all pervaded with a slight flavour of smoke—could anything be more delicious to a famished boy? Frank abandoned himself silently to the enjoyment of it; and though his companions cast interested glances at him from time to time, no one spoke. It was a very quiet assembly. All round and above them the new little green leaves danced and twinkled, and on the ground the old ones made a rich brown carpet; the blue smoke of the fire rose thinly up in the midst.

At last Frank gave a deep sigh of contentment as he put down his tin mug, and the deaf man clapped him kindly on the shoulder.

"Hast taken the edge off, little chap?" he said.

Then the two men, stretched luxuriously on the ground, filled their pipes and smoked in silence. The boy, who was about Frank's own age, but brown-faced and stoutly built, busied himself in clearing away the remains of the meal, and in carefully making up the fire with dry chips and shavings; he seemed to have caught the infection of silence from his companions, and eyed the stranger guest without speaking a word. But Frank, who was revived and cheered by his food, felt inclined for a little conversation; he was always of an inquisitive turn of mind, and he was longing to ask some questions; so as the boy passed near him he ventured to say, pointing to the neat piles of wood:

"What be yon?"

The boy stared.

"Yon?" he repeated; "why, yon be legs and rungs of cheers—that's what we make 'em fur."

"Where be the cheers?" pursued Frank.

"We send all yon down to Wickham, to the cheer factory," answered the boy; "we don't fit 'em together here."

He seated himself at Frank's side as he spoke, and poked at the fire with a long pointed stick.

"How do they get 'em down to Wickham?" asked Frank, bent on getting as much information as possible.

The boy pointed to a broad cart-track, which descended abruptly from one side of the clearing.

"They fetch a cart up yonder, and take 'em down into the high-road."

"And how fur is it?"

"A matter of two miles, and then three miles further to the factory, and there they make 'em up into cheers, and then they send 'em up to Lunnon Town by the rail."

Frank remembered the great cart-loads of chairs that he had seen passing through Danecross, but what chiefly struck him in his companion's answer were the two words "Lunnon Town." They fell on his ear with a new meaning. He had read of Lunnon Town, and heard schoolmaster talk of it, but had never imagined it as a place he could see, any more than America. Now, suddenly, an idea of such vast enterprise seized on his mind, that it stunned him

into silence. He would go to Lunnon Town! Everyone became rich there. He would become rich too; then he would go back to Green Highlands, and give all his money to mother; there would be no need for any more field-work, and they would all be happy. At the thought of mother his eyes filled with tears, for he knew how unhappy she would be when he did not come back, and how she would stand at the door and look out for him. He longed to set about making this great fortune at once, it seemed a waste of time to sit idle; but he knew he must rest that night, for his legs felt stiff and aching; besides he had to work out his meal.

In half an hour the deaf man's lathe was hard at work again, and the two boys busily employed near. Frank's new friend showed him how to arrange the pieces of wood neatly in piles when they were turned and smoothed. He hummed a tune in the intervals of conversation and presently asked:

"Can yer sing?"

Frank *could* sing—very well. He was one of the best singers in Danecross choir, and Mrs. Darvell held her head very high when she heard

her boy's voice in church; so he answered with a certain pride:

"Ah, I can sing proper well."

"Sing summat," said the boy.

Frank waited a minute to choose a tune, and then sang "Ring the Bell, Watchman" straight through. The boy listened attentively, and joined, after the second verse, in the chorus, which was also taken up in a gruff and uncertain manner by the mate in the other shed. The deaf man looked on approvingly, and the lathe kept up a grinding accompaniment.

"That's fine, that is," said the boy when the last notes of Frank's clear voice died away. "Do yer know any more?"

"I know a side more," said Frank, "and hymns too."

"Can yer sing 'Home Sweet Home?'" asked the boy.

"Ah."

But this song was not so successful, for after the chorus had been sung with great animation, and the second verse eagerly expected, something choked and gurgled in Frank's throat so that he could not sing any more. All that night, as he

lay on the bed of shavings, which he shared with his new companion, he waked at intervals to hear those words echoing through the woods: "Home Sweet Home—There's no place like Home." But with the morning sun these sounds vanished, and he began his onward journey cheerily, refreshed by his rest and food. As he went down the cart-track the boy had pointed out to him he sang scraps of songs to himself, the birds twittered busily above his head, and the distant sound of the deaf man's lathe came more and more faintly to his ears. He felt sure now that he was on his way to make his fortune, and the wood seemed full of voices which said, "Lunnon Town, Lunnon Town," over and over again. The thought of his mother's sad face was, it is true, a little depressing. "But," he said to himself, "how pleased she'll be when I come back rich!" Then he considered what sort of shawl he would buy for her with the first money he earned—whether it should be a scarlet one, or mixed colours with an apple-green border, like one he had seen once in a shop at Daylesbury.

These fancies beguiled the way, and he was surprised when, after what seemed a short time,

he found himself at the edge of the wood, and in a broad high-road; that must be the Wickham Road, and he had still three miles to walk before reaching the town and the chair factories, where he meant to ask for work as a first step on his way to London.

It was not a busy-looking road, and the carts and people who passed now and then seemed to have plenty of time and no wish to hurry; still, to Frank, who was used to the solitude of Green Highlands and the deeper quiet of the woods, it felt like getting into the world, and he looked down at his clothes, and wondered how they would suit a large town. He wore a smock, high brown leather gaiters reaching almost to his thighs, and very thick hobnailed boots. He wished he had his Sunday coat on instead of the smock, but the rest of the things would do very well, and they were so strong and good that they would last a long time. So this point settled he trudged on again, till, by twelve o'clock, he saw Wickham in the distance with its gabled red houses and tall factory buildings. And now that he was so near, his courage forsook him a little, and he felt that he was a very small weak

boy, and that the factories were full of bustling work-people who would take no notice of him. He stood irresolute in the street, wondering to whom he ought to apply, and presently his eye was attracted to the window of a small baker's shop near. Through this he saw a kind-looking round-faced woman, who stood behind the counter knitting. Just in front of her there was, curled round, a sleek black cat, and she stopped in her work now and then to scratch its head gently with her knitting-pin. Somehow this encouraged Frank, and entering he put his question timidly, in his broad Buckinghamshire accent.

The woman smiled at him good-naturedly.

"From the country, I reckon?" she said, not answering his question.

"Ah," replied Frank, "I be."

"You're a dillicate little feller to be trampin' about alone seekin' work," she said, considering him thoughtfully. "Is yer mother livin'?"

"Ah," said Frank again, casting longing eyes at a crisp roll on the counter.

"Then why don't yer bide at home," asked the woman, "and work there?"

"I want to get more wage," said Frank, who

was feeling hungrier every minute with the smell of the bread. "I'll be obliged to yer if ye'll tell me how I could git taken on at the factory."

"You must go and ask at the overseer's office up next street, where you see a brass plate on the door—name of Green. But bless yer 'art, we've lads enough and to spare in Wickham; I doubt they won't want a country boy who knows nought of the trade."

"I can try," said Frank; "and I learn things quick. Schoolmaster said so."

The woman shook her head.

"You'd be better at home, my little lad," she said, "till you're a bit older. There's no place like home."

Those same words had been sounding in Frank's ears all night. They seemed to meet him everywhere, he thought, like a sort of warning. Nevertheless he was not going to give up his plan, and having learned the direction of the overseer's office he turned to leave the shop.

"And here's summat to set yer teeth in as you go along," said the woman, holding out a long roll of bread. "Growing lads should allus be eatin'."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Frank, and he took off his cap politely, as he had been taught at school, and went his way.

"As pretty behaved as possible," murmured the woman as she looked after him, "and off with his hat like a prince. What sort o' folks does he belong to, I wonder!"

The overseer's office was a small dark room with a high desk in it, at which sat a sandy-haired red-faced man, with his hat very much on the back of his head. He was talking in a loud blustering voice to several workmen, and as Frank entered he heard the last part of the speech.

"So you can tell Smorthwaite and the rest of 'em that they can come on again on the old terms, but they'll not get a farthing more. Well, boy," as he noticed Frank standing humbly in the background, "what do *you* want?"

Mr. Green's manner was that of an incensed and much-tried man, and Frank felt quite afraid to speak.

"Please, sir," he said, "do you want a boy in the factory?"

"Do I want a boy!" repeated the overseer,

addressing the ceiling in a voice of despair. "No, of course I don't want a boy. If I had my will I'd have no boys in the place—I'm sick of the sight of boys."

He bent his eyes on a newspaper before him, and seemed to consider the matter disposed of; but Frank made one more timid venture.

"Please, sir," he said, going close up to the desk, "I'd work very stiddy."

Mr. Green peered over his high desk at the sound of the small persistent voice, and frowned darkly.

"Clear out!" he said with a nod of his head towards the door; "don't stop here talking nonsense. Out you go!"

Frank dared not stay; he slunk out into the street crushed and disappointed, for he felt he had not even had a chance. "He might a listened to a chap," he said to himself.

Just then the church clock struck one, dinner time, and a convenient doorstep near, so he took the roll out of the breast of his smock-frock and sat down to eat it. As he had never been used to very luxurious meals it satisfied him pretty well; and then he watched the people passing to

and fro, and wondered what he could do to earn some money. The chair-factory was hopeless certainly, but there must surely be some one in Wickham who wanted a boy to run errands, or dig gardens, or help in stables. What should he do? Without money he must starve; he could neither go on to London or back to Green Highlands.

The street was almost deserted now, for all the people who had dinners waiting for them had hurried home to eat them, and no one had noticed the rustic little figure in the gray gaberdine crouched on the doorstep. Suddenly a dreadful feeling of loneliness seized on Frank, such as he had not felt since leaving home. Even the great solitary wood had not seemed so cold and unfriendly as this town, full of human faces, where the very houses seemed to stare blankly upon him. He thought of the kind baker woman, and immediately her words sounded in his ear: "There's no place like home." If he went to her she would try to persuade him to go back, and that he was still determined not to do; but his golden pictures of the future had faded a good deal since that morning, and as he sat and

looked wistfully at the hard red houses opposite he could not help his eyes filling with tears. Fortunately, he thought, there was no one to see them; but still he felt ashamed of crying, and bent his head on his folded arms. Sitting thus for some minutes, he was presently startled by a voice close by.

"What's up, little un?" it said.

Frank looked up quickly, and saw that the question came from a boy standing in front of him. He was a very tall, thin boy, about fifteen years old, with a dark face and narrow twinkling black eyes. All his clothes were ragged, and none of them seemed to fit him properly, for his coat-sleeves were inconveniently long, and his trousers so short that they showed several inches of brown bony ankles. On his head he wore a rusty black felt hat with half a brim, which was turned down over his eyes; his feet were bare; and he carried under his arm a cage full of nimble crawling white mice.

After a minute's observation Frank decided in his mind that this must be a "tramp." Now and then these wandering folks passed through Danecross and the neighbourhood on their way

to large towns; and, as a rule, people looked askance at them. It was awkward to have them about when ducklings and chickens were being reared, and Frank had always heard them spoken of with contempt and suspicion. Just now, however, any sympathy appeared valuable, and he smiled back at the twinkling black eyes, and answered:

"There's nowt the matter with me. I'm wantin' work."

The boy seemed to think this an amusing idea, for he grinned widely, showing an even row of very white teeth. Then he sat down on the doorstep, put his cage of mice on the ground, and began to whistle; his bright eyes keenly observing Frank from top to toe meanwhile, and finally resting on his thick hobnailed boots. Then he asked briefly:

"Farm-work?"

"I'd ratherly get any other," answered Frank. And feeling it his turn to make some inquiries, he said:

"What do yer carry them mice fur?"

The boy looked at him for a minute in silence; then he chuckled, and gave a long low whistle.

"I say, little chap," he said confidentially, "*ain't* you a flat! Just rather."

Seeing on Frank's face no sign of comprehension he continued:

"Without them little mice I should be what they calls a wagrant. Many a time they've saved me from the beak, and from being run in. Them's my business; and a nice easy trade it is. Lots of change and wariety. No one to wallop yer. Live like a jintleman."

He waved his hand at his last words with a gesture expressive of large and easy circumstances. Frank glanced at his bare feet and generally dishevelled appearance.

"I don't want to live like a jintleman," he said; "I want to work honest, and git wage."

"Why did yer cut and run then?" said his companion suddenly and sharply. "Did they wallop yer?"

Frank started. How could this strange boy possibly know that he had run away? His alarmed face seemed to afford the tramp the keenest amusement; he laughed long and loud, leaning back on the steps in an ecstasy, and said at breathless intervals:

"You're just the innocentest, greenest little chap. How old are yer?"

Frank did not answer; he was considering the best means of getting away from this undesirable acquaintance, who presently, wiping his eyes with the cuff of his jacket, remarked with recovered gravity:

"In course, yer know, no one 'ull take a boy what's run away."

This was a new and alarming idea to Frank.

"*Won't* they?" he said earnestly.

"Certingly not," continued the tramp. "Where's yer carikter? You 'ain't got none."

Frank hung his head. He wondered he had not thought of this before.

"This is where it lies," pursued his companion, holding out a very dirty hand dramatically in front of him. "You comes, as it might be, to me and you says, 'I want a sitivation.' Then I says, 'Where's yer carikter?' Then you says, 'I 'ain't got one.' Then I says, 'Out yer go.'"

Having thus placed the situation in a nutshell, as it were, he put his hands in his pockets and observed Frank covertly out of the corners of

his eyes. Seeing how crestfallen he looked, the tramp presently spoke again.

"Now, in my line of bizness it's not so important a carikter isn't. I might very likely look over it in takin' a pal if he asked me. In course it would be a favour; but still I might look over it."

"Do you want a pal?" asked Frank, pushed to extremity.

"Well, I don't, not to say *want* a pal," replied the tramp, "but I don't mind stretching a pint in your case if you like to jine."

The blue eyes and the glittering black ones met for an instant.

"I'll jine yer," said Frank with a sigh.

The tramp held out his long-fingered brown hand.

"Shake hands," he said. "The terms is, halves all we git."

The bargain concluded, he informed Frank that his name was Barney, and further introduced him to the mice, called respectively Jumbo, Alice, and Lord Beaconsfield.

This last, a mouse of weak-eyed and feeble appearance, he took out of the cage and allowed to

crawl over him, stroking it tenderly now and then with the tip of his finger.

"He's an artful one, he is," he murmured admiringly. "I calls him Dizzy for short. What's your name, little un?"

"Frank."

"That sounds a good sort o' name too," said Barney; "sort o' name you see in gowld letters on a chany mug in the shop winders, don't it? I don't fancy, though, I could bring my tongue to it, not as a *jineral* thing. I shall call yer 'Nipper,' if you don't mind. After a friend o' mine."

The new name appearing rather an advantage than otherwise under his present circumstances Frank agreed to drop his own, and to be henceforth known only as the "Nipper." This change seemed to have broken the last link which bound him to Green Highlands and his own people. He was Frank Darvell no longer; he belonged to no one; the wide world was his home; Barney and the white mice his only friends and companions.

CHAPTER III.

IN the wandering life that followed, Frank had excellent opportunities for studying the character of his new comrade, and it did not take long to discover two prominent points in it. Barney was a liar and a thief. These accomplishments, indeed, had formed the principal features in poor Barney's education from his tenderest childhood. He had always been taught that it was desirable and proper to lie and steal; the only wrong and undesirable thing was—to be found out. To do Barney justice he very seldom *was* found out; nimble of finger and quick of wit he had profited well by his lessons, and by the time Frank met him had long been a finished scholar, and able to "do" for himself. In spite of these failings he was a kind-hearted boy; he would not have hurt any living thing weaker than himself, and Frank's pale face and slender form soon appealed to his protective instincts in much the same way that his white mice did, for which he cherished a fond affection.

If the night were cold he always managed that the Nipper had the warmest shelter, and when provisions were scarce the least tasty morsels were always reserved for himself, as a matter of course. Then what an amusing companion he was! How his ingenious stories, mostly a tissue of falsehood, beguiled the weary way, and made Frank forget his aching feet! He believed them all at first, and his innocent credulousness acted as a spur to Barney's fertile invention and excited him to fresh and wilder efforts. On one occasion, however, his imagination carried him beyond the limits of even Frank's capacity of belief, and from that moment suspicion began. He had been romancing about the riches and wealth of people who lived in London (where he had never been), and after describing at great length that the houses were none of them smaller than the whole town of Wickham put together, he added:

"An the folks niver uses ought but gowld to eat an drink off."

Frank looked up quickly.

"You're wrong there," he said. "My mother's got a chany jug what used to belong to her

grandfather, and *he* lived in Lunnon." Observing a twinkle in the corner of Barney's eye he continued in an injured tone:

"You've bin lyin'. Lies is wicked, and stealin's wicked too."

There was a sound of conscious superiority in his tone, which was naturally irritating to his companion, who laughed hoarsely.

"Jest listen to him," he said, addressing Lord Beaconsfield for want of a more intelligent audience, "listen to him! Don't he preach fine? An' him a boy without a carikter too! Lies is wicked, eh? and stealin's wicked. Who told him that, I wonder?"

"It's in the catekizum," continued Frank. "Parson allers said so, and Schoolmaster too."

Barney made a gesture expressive of much contempt at the mention of these two dignitaries.

"Parson and Schoolmaster!" he said derisively. "Why, in course they said so; they're paid to do it. That's how they earns their money. But jest you please to remember, that yer not Parson, not yit Schoolmaster, but a boy without a carikter, so shut up with yer preachin'."

Without a character! It was hard, Frank

thought, that he, a respectable Danecross boy, who had been to school, and sung in the choir, and whose folks had always worked honest and got good wages, should have come to this! That a vagrant tramp, who could neither read nor write, and who got his living anyhow, should be able to call him "a boy without a carikter!"

And the worst of it was, that it was true, he sadly thought, as he plodded along in the dust by Barney's side. He had thrown away his right to be considered respectable—no one would employ him if they knew he had run away, and still less if they knew he had been "on the tramp" with a boy like Barney.

However, as time went on, such serious thoughts troubled him less frequently; as long as the sun shone, it was easy to avoid dwelling on them amidst the change and uncertainty of his vagrant life.

But there were not two days alike in it. Sometimes luck, plenty to eat, and a bed of dry straw in a barn—that was luxury. Sometimes a weary tramp in the pouring rain, no coppers and no supper. Under these last circumstances the "Nipper" was sharply reminded of the time when

he was Frank Darvell, and lived at Green Highlands; shivering and hungry, his thoughts would dwell regretfully on the comfort and security he had left. Mother's face would come before him sad and reproachful. Poor mother! She would never have that shawl with the apple-green border now. Her Frank, instead of making a great fortune in London town, had become a wanderer and a tramp; and indeed after a month's companionship with Barney he was so altered that she would hardly have known him. Sleeping under hedges or in outhouses had not improved his clothes, which were now stained and torn. His pale face was changed by wind and weather, and also by a plentiful supply of dust, seldom washed off, into a dirty brown one, and his hair, once kept so neatly cropped, now hung about in bushy tangles like Barney's. Only his bright blue eyes, with their innocent childishness of expression, were recognizable, and these gained him many a copper when he carried round his cap after Barney's feeble performances with the white mice.

But though changed outwardly, there was one good habit which Frank had brought away from

Green Highlands, and to which he clung with a persistency which surprised and irritated his partner. This was honesty. Nothing would induce him to steal, or even to share stolen booty; hunger, threats, bitterly sarcastic speeches were alike in vain, and at last Barney's scornful amusement at the "boy without a carikter" began to be mingled with a certain respect; not that he was the least inclined to follow his example and give up pilfering himself, but he thought it was "game" of the little 'un to hold his own, and that was a quality he could understand and admire. After all, a chap that had been brought up by parsons and schoolmasters must have allowances made for him, he supposed, and he soon gave up all idea of inducing Frank to thieve, and even kept his own exploits in the background, because the "Nipper" took it to heart.

So, sharing sometimes hardships, and sometimes pleasures, the oddly-matched partners journeyed on, with an increasing attachment to each other, and Frank's thoughts travelled back less and less often to Green Highlands.

For now the bright warm weather had set fairly in, and all the different flowers came

marching on in sweet procession, and filled the woods and fields. After the primroses, and while some still remained sprinkled about in the sunny places, came the deep blue hyacinths, and then the golden kingcups, and the downy yellow cowslips: last of all, a tall triumphant host of foxgloves spread themselves over forest and common. The wind, blowing softly from the west, brought with it little gentle showers, just enough to freshen the leaves and wash the upturned faces of the blossoms; tramping was a luxury in such weather, and those people much to be pitied who had to work in close dark rooms, hidden away from the glorious sunshine.

Certainly it was rather *too* hot sometimes, and the roads were dusty and gritty, and the boys' throats got parched with thirst after a very few miles; but there was always the hope of coming to some delicious, cool green bit by the way, or to a stream of water, or to some comfortable village seat under the shadow of a great tree. And this kept up their spirits. One day they had walked far in a blazing July sun along an unshaded high-road; it was evening now, and they were wondering where they should sleep, and

how they should get some supper, when they came to a narrow lane turning off to the right, with steep banks on each side of it. There was a sign-post, which, interpreted by Frank, said, To Crowhurst—one mile.

The boys consulted a little, and soon determined to leave the high-road, which seemed endless, as far as they could see, and try their fortune in Crowhurst for the night. It was not long before they came to it, lying in a hollow, and snugly sheltered by gently rising wooded ground. It was a very little village indeed. There was a small gray church with a stumpy square tower, and a cheerful red-brick inn called the Holly Bush, with a swinging sign in front of it; there were half a dozen little cottages with gay gardens, and, standing close to the road, there was a long, low, many-gabled house which was evidently the vicarage. It was such a snug, smiling little settlement altogether that Barney and Frank, slouching along dusty and tired, felt quite out of place and uneasy at the glances cast at them by the people standing at their open doors or in their trim gardens. However, there was a bench outside the inn, and there they presently sat

down to rest and look about them. The vicarage was just opposite; and one of its wide lattice windows being open, the boys could see plainly into the room, where the most prominent object was the figure of an old gentleman, with gray hair and a velvet skull-cap; he sat at a table writing busily, and everything was so quiet and still that they could even hear the scratch of his quill pen, and the rustle of the sheets of manuscript which he threw from time to time on the floor. Sometimes he looked vaguely out of the window, and sometimes he took off his skull-cap and rubbed his bald head with his pocket handkerchief—then he bent busily over his writing again. Frank, watching him lazily, wondered what he could have to write so much about, and then it occurred to him that perhaps he might be the schoolmaster correcting the boys' exercises; from that, his mind wandered back to Danecross and the school-room there, where it used to be so hot in summer, and the bees buzzed and murmured so in the garden outside, and the boys within. And gradually, his ideas becoming confused between bees and boys, and being very tired, he forgot the old gentleman and fell asleep.

But, meanwhile, the acute Barney, sitting by his side and apparently engrossed with his white mice, had been attentively observing the same scene Unfortunately, whenever the old gentleman dipped his pen absently in the ink Barney's quick eye was attracted to a small object which glittered brightly, and presently he made out that this was a silver inkstand. The more he looked, the more his fingers longed to close round that shining object and make sure if it really could be silver, and I grieve to say that it was not from pressing necessity that he coveted it, but simply from a strong desire to exercise an inborn talent. It was as natural to him to steal, particularly if it required cleverness and ingenuity, as it is for an artist or a poet to paint or write poetry, so all the while he looked, his mind was busy with a plan to rob the old gentleman of his silver inkstand.

Presently he glanced round at Frank, whose head was nodding forward in an uncomfortable attitude, and whose deep breathing showed him to be asleep. "If only he warn't sich a duffer," said Barney to himself, "we might do it easy," then seeing that his partner was in danger of

falling, he moved nearer to him, and placed the boy's head gently against his own shoulder so that he might rest easily. Meanwhile the old gentleman's pen went scribbling on at quite a furious pace, and the black skull-cap seemed to nod complacently, as though its owner were pleased with what he wrote.

Barney sat and waited with the sleeping boy's head on his shoulder—waited patiently, without stirring a muscle, though after a time the stiff position became painful. Shadows were lengthening—the cows sauntered through the village to be milked—it began to get a little dusk, but still the old gentleman went on writing and Frank went on sleeping, and Barney's bright glance was fixed on the shining object opposite, much as a raven or a jackdaw will eye the silver spoon he means to steal by and by. "Everything comes to him who knows how to wait," and though Barney had never heard the proverb it was now verified in his case; the old gentleman paused in his writing, stuck his pen absently behind his ear, and proceeded to read over his manuscript. It pleased him evidently, for he smiled several times, and shook his head waggishly.

Then he got up, yawned, stretched himself, and finally left the room, but only to reappear a moment later in the porch: thence he strolled down the narrow brick path to the gate, with his hands in the pockets of his flowered dressing-gown, and looked up and down the road, and up at the sky, and finally at the two dusty figures opposite on the bench. It was on Frank that his gaze rested, and just then, aided by a quiet poke from Barney's elbow, the boy roused himself, sat up, and rubbed his eyes.

"Jintleman wants yer," said Barney, whispering hoarsely in his ear.

Hardly awake, Frank stumbled across the road, and mechanically touched his cap. The old gentleman stood beaming benignly at him through his spectacles.

"What do you want, my lad?" he said in a kind voice.

Directly Frank heard him speak he knew he could not be the schoolmaster, but the parson of the village. Parson at Danecross used to speak in the same sort of way. He felt ashamed to beg, and looked back at Barney for support, who immediately came slouching up with his

white mice, and began to speak in his usual professional whine.

The old gentleman waved his hand impatiently.

"Stop," he said; "I don't want to hear any of those stories. You can't impose upon me, so you needn't try." Then he turned to Frank. "Are you willing to work for your supper and a bed in the hayloft to-night?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Frank eagerly; "and so's Barney too."

The rector, for such he was, glanced somewhat doubtfully at Barney.

"Well," he said, "there's an hour's weeding in my kitchen-garden that you can easily do before dark, and then you shall have bread and cheese, and may sleep in the loft. Where have you come from?"

He spoke to Frank, but the boy did not answer; and Barney, coming glibly to the rescue, had in a few moments woven an ingenious fable, in which he frequently referred to his companion as "his little brother."

The rector listened without further question, but his shrewd gray eyes rested suspiciously on Barney when he had finished his story.

"Come this way," he said, and led them round to the back of the house, where there was a neatly kept kitchen-garden, with borders of homely flowers, and a small orchard at the end of it. Here he paused, and showed the boys that one of the gravel walks was thickly covered with grass weeds. A man leant on the orchard gate smoking a pipe.

"Andrew," said the rector, "when those two boys have weeded that path they are to have supper and a bed in the loft."

The man touched his cap with a very ill-pleased expression, and the old gentleman strolled back into the house and left the boys to their work, which they undertook with very different feelings. On Barney's side there was a distinct sense of injury, and he performed his task with great bitterness of soul; for to work for anything was contrary to his inmost nature, and to every principle of his life hitherto. So he sighed and groaned and held on to his long back with both hands at intervals, and managed to do as small a share of the weeding as possible. Frank, on the contrary, went to work with a will, with a pleasant sense that he was earning something, and

he was careful to get the weeds up by the roots, instead of slicing them off neatly at the top, which was Barney's unprincipled method of gardening. Meanwhile Andrew's watchful eye never left the boys; and in answer to his master's inquiries that night his opinion of them was thus delivered:

"Long un's no good, but t'other's bin taught to use his hands. He's no tramp."

Frank lay awake long that night in the fragrant hay-loft thinking. The kind old rector, the work, the supper, had roused old memories in his mind, and his tramping life of late seemed suddenly distasteful. He longed to "work honest and get wage," and feel a respectable boy again. If only this nice old gentleman would let him stay and work in his garden; but that, Frank remembered with a sigh, was hopeless, because he had "no carikter." And then, there was Barney —Barney, who had always been good to him, and who had helped him when he most wanted it, he could not desert him now; and as for trying to turn him from his present course of life, that was just the most hopeless thing of all. So, rather sorrowfully, he turned over on the other side, and very shortly fell fast asleep.

Barney slept too with the profound peacefulness of a mind at rest, as, indeed, it was; for with the morning's light he had firmly resolved to steal the old gentleman's silver inkstand, and he was troubled with no doubts either as to the propriety or success of the undertaking. The fastening of that lattice-window would be easily managed by a dexterous hand, and before any of the folks were about he and Frank would be beyond pursuit; only he must be careful not to wake the Nipper before he had secured his booty, as he might make foolish and troublesome objections.

So it came to pass that it was only just daylight next morning when Frank was waked from a deep sleep by some one shaking his arm, and by the dim gray light he saw Barney kneeling by him with an eager look in his dark face.

"Get up!" he whispered.

"'Tain't time," murmured Frank, rolling over sleepily.

But Barney renewed his shaking, and at last succeeded in thoroughly rousing his comrade, who sat up and stared at him with surprised blue eyes.

"Why, Barney," he said, "it's night still, What do yer want to go on fur? The old gentleman ull want to see us afore we start; we mustn't go yet."

Barney frowned darkly.

"I niver want to see that old cove, niver no more," he said; and this was truer than Frank thought. "I calls it a mean act to make a poor chap work for a bit o' supper. He's no jintleman, he isn't."

"Well," said Frank, "I should like to a said 'Thank yer;' it seems ongrateful."

"Then you'd better stop and do it," said Barney impatiently. "I'm off. I'm not goin' to stay an work in that blessed old garding any more. You can come arter me."

He was already half-way down the loft steps as he spoke, with his mice's cage under his arm, when he looked back over his shoulder at his partner's slight figure standing at the top in the dim light watching him. Turning suddenly, he was by Frank's side again in two long-legged strides.

"Good-bye, Nipper," he whispered, "good-bye, old pal!"

He patted the boy on the shoulder gently, and soon with stealthy swiftness passed from sight, and seemed to vanish in the gray morning mist.

Then Frank, wondering a little, but more sleepy than curious, crept back to his still warm nest in the hay, and fell asleep again without loss of time.

He dreamt that Barney had come back to fetch him, and opened his eyes some hours later expecting to see him; but he was not there. Instead of him there was Andrew the gardener just coming up the steps in a great hurry.

He seized Frank roughly by the arm.

"Oh, you're here, are you, young scamp?" he said. Then looking round the loft.

"Where's t'other?"

"He's gone on before," answered Frank, surprised and confused at this treatment.

"Oh, I daresay," said Andrew, giving him a shake. "And I suppose you don't even know what he's got in his pocket. You're a nice young innercent. You jest come along with me."

He hurried the boy along, holding him tight by the collar of his smock, and thrust him into the room with the lattice-window, where the

rector had been writing the night before. He was there now, walking feverishly backwards and forwards, and looking thoroughly ill at ease.

"Here's one on 'em, sir," said Andrew triumphantly introducing the small trembling form of Frank, "an' t'other's not far off, I reckon."

The rector looked more than ever perturbed.

"Where was the boy, Andrew?" he asked. "Does he know anything of the matter?"

"He was in the loft, and he's just the most owdacious young rascal; says t'other one's gone on before. He'll know more about it, I fancy, after a day or two in the lock-up."

Andrew administered a rousing shake to his captive as he spoke. He was not ill-pleased that the rector should at last see the result of encouraging tramps.

Hitherto Frank had been in a state of puzzled misery, and had scarcely understood what was going on; but when Andrew mentioned the word lock-up, the whole matter was clear to him. Barney had stolen something; that was the meaning of his abrupt departure before daylight.

The rector looked at him pityingly.

"Where is your companion, my boy?" he said.

Frank did not answer; he stood perfectly passive in Andrew's hands, and cast his eyes on the ground.

"Don't yer hear his reverence?" shouted the latter in the boy's ear.

"I dunno," said Frank faintly.

"You'd better let me run him over to Aylesford and have him locked up, sir," said Andrew. "He'd find a tongue then."

Frank raised his frightened blue eyes entreatingly to the rector's face without speaking; he saw something in the kind rugged features which encouraged him, for with sudden energy he wriggled himself loose from Andrew and threw himself on his knees.

"Don't let them lock me up, sir," he sobbed. "I've allers bin a honest lad."

"Was it your companion who broke into this room this morning and stole my inkstand?" pursued the rector.

"I dunno," repeated Frank. "I didn't see him steal nuthin', I was asleep."

"Would he be likely to do it?"

"I dunno," said Frank under his breath, deeply conscious that he *did* know very well.

"Is he your brother?"

"No," cried Frank with a sudden burst of eloquence, "he's no kin to me. I'm Frank Darvell's lad, what lives at Green Highlands. And Parson knows me—and Schoolmaster. And I've niver stolen nowt in my life. Don't ye let 'em lock me up!"

"A likely story!" growled Andrew. "Honest lads don't go trampin' round with thieves."

The rector, whose face had softened at the boy's appeal, seemed to pull himself together sternly at this remark; he frowned, and said, turning away a little from Frank's tear-stained face: "I would gladly believe you, my boy, but it is too improbable. As Andrew says, honest boys do not associate with thieves."

"Ask any of 'em at Danecross, sir," pleaded poor Frank in despair; "anyone ull tell ye I belong to honest folk."

"That's no proof you're not a thief," put in the persistent Andrew; "there's many a rotten apple hangs on a sound tree."

The rector looked up impatiently.

"Leave the boy alone with me, Andrew," he said, "I wish to ask him some questions;" and as the

man left the room he seated himself in his big leather chair and beckoned Frank to him. "Come here," he said, "and answer me truthfully."

Frank stood at his elbow, trembling still in fear of being sent to prison, and yet with a faint hope stealing into his heart.

Bit by bit he sobbed forth his story in answer to the rector's questions, and finally raising his swollen eyelids to the kind face he said:

"If so be as mother was to know I wur sent to prison it 'ud break her 'art."

"Tell me," said the rector, "have your parents lived long at Green Highlands? Are they well known there?"

"Father, he's lived there all his life," said Frank; "and granther, he used to live there too. Father can do a better day's work nor any man in Danecross," he added with conscious pride.

"Ah!" said the rector, "it's a fine thing to be a good workman, and to have earned a good name, isn't it?"

Frank hung his head.

"But it isn't done by tramping about the country with bad companions. A good name's a precious thing, and like all precious things

it's got by trouble and labour. It's the best thing a father can hand down to his son. When he begins life, men say, 'He's Frank Darvell's son, he comes of a good stock;' and so the 'good name' his father earned is of great use to him. But he can't live on that; he has to make one of his own too, so that he can hand it on to *his* sons and daughters and say, 'There's my father's name, I've never disgraced it; now it's your turn to use it well.' But suppose that the son doesn't value his father's good name. Suppose that he chooses an idle good-for-nothing life and his own pleasure, rather than to work hard and live honestly; what happens then? Why, then, men soon leave off trusting him, and say, 'He's not the man his father was;' and so the name of Darvell, which used to be so honoured and respected, comes to be connected with evil things. Then, perhaps too late, the son finds that 'a good name is more to be desired than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.' But he has thrown away the good name and the loving favour too, for he has drifted away from his old friends and companions. He can *never* get back to where he started from."

The solemn monotonous voice—for the rector had dropped unconsciously into his sermon tones—and the emphasis on the last words completed Frank's misery of spirit.

Clasping his hands, he fell on his knees and said imploringly:

"Let me go home, sir. Let me go back. I'd be proper glad to see 'em all again."

"Whom would you like to see again?" asked the rector kindly.

"There's mother first," said Frank, "and father on Sundays, and then Schoolmaster, and Jack Gunn, and little Phœbe Redrup."

"My little lad," said the rector, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "you see there's no place like home. Home, where people know us and love us in spite of our faults. I think you won't want to run away again?"

"Niver no more," sobbed Frank.

"And now," said the rector rising, and reassuming the air of severity which he had quite laid aside during the last part of the interview. "I am going to write to the vicar of Danecross, who is a friend of mine. If I find that what you have told me is true we will say no more about

the inkstand, and I will believe that you had no knowledge of the theft. Until then you must be treated as under suspicion, though we will not send you to prison."

He summoned Andrew, and delivered Frank over to his charge. Disgusted to find that he was not to be "run in" as an example to tramps, from whom his master's orchard and garden had suffered so frequently, Andrew was determined that his captive should have no chance of escape, and as rigorous a confinement as possible. Frank was therefore locked up in a small harness-room, as the place of greatest security and discomfort; and here he passed the lonely day in much distress of mind, troubled with many fears concerning his late friend and companion Barney.

The rector himself was hardly more at his ease, however, for he would willingly have dispensed with the zeal of his parishioners, who had been scouring the country since daybreak in search of the thief, and kept him in a constant tremor. The good people of Crowhurst seldom had the chance of such an excitement as this unexpected robbery, and though few things would have embarrassed the rector more than a

successful end to the chase, he did not dare to check their ardour.

His peaceful solitude was therefore perpetually disturbed throughout the day by the arrival of breathless parties of scouts. He would sally out to the gate to meet them, and ask nervously:

"Well, my lads, seen anything of him, eh?"

Deep was his inward relief when the day closed in with no news of the thief, for he would have cheerfully sacrificed many silver inkstands rather than have been obliged to deliver the unfortunate Barney into the hands of justice.

. . . .

Two evenings later than this, the vicar of Danecross stood at the open door of the Darvells' cottage at Green Highlands, and looked into the room. Mrs. Darvell was alone, scrubbing away at her brick floor on her knees, and surrounded by a formidable array of pails, and brushes, and mops. The place had a comfortless air, and there was no fire on the hearth.

"Late at work, Mrs. Darvell, eh?" was the vicar's greeting as he stood on the threshold.

Mrs. Darvell got up quickly, and dropped her

usual brisk courtesy, but her face looked dull and spiritless.

"I'm in too much of a muss to ask you in, sir," she said, glancing round.

"Oh, never mind," said the clergyman; "where's Darvell? Isn't he back from work yet?"

Mrs. Darvell shrugged her shoulders, and made an expressive movement with her head in the direction of Danecross.

"I reckon he's where he generally is now," she answered moodily, "at the 'Nag's Head.'"

"Why, that's something new, isn't it? I always consider Darvell one of the steadiest men in my parish."

Mrs. Darvell looked up defiantly.

"Maybe it's partly my fault," she said; "but we've never had a minute's comfort since the little lad went. And things get worse and worse. I don't care no more to keep the place nice, and I ups and speaks sharp to Darvell, and he goes off to the 'Nag's Head.'"

The vicar nodded his head slowly, as though Darvell's conduct was not quite incomprehensible under such circumstances, and Mrs. Darvell continued in a lower tone:

"You know, sir, it wur because my man lifted his hand to Frank that the lad went off; and I don't seem as how I can forget it. When I look at Darvell I keep on rememberin' as how, if he'd bin more patient with the boy we should ha' had him with us still. Darvell's been a good man to me, but I can't help speaking sharp to him; though maybe I'm sorry after I done it, for there's only the two on us now, and we'll have to worry along together."

The vicar shook his head.

"Hard blows are bad things, Mrs. Darvell, but hard words do quite as much mischief in their way. If your husband has driven Frank from home, does it mend matters for you to drive your husband to the public-house?"

"There's truth in what you say, sir," said Mrs. Darvell, rubbing her arms with her apron; "but I don't seem as if I cared to do any different now the boy's gone. I've allers had a quick tongue from a gall, and Darvell, he must just take the consequences."

"But suppose," said the vicar, looking earnestly at her, "suppose that Frank were to come back to you safe and well, and Darvell were to promise

never to be so harsh to him again, wouldn't you try then to keep from saying sharp things?"

Mrs. Darvell's black eyes fixed themselves keenly on the vicar's face.

"You've heard summat, sir?" she said, laying one damp red hand on his coat-sleeve. "Is the lad livin'? Just tell me that. Is he livin'?"

"Look there," said the vicar.

He turned and pointed down the road, where, at the top of the hill leading up from Danecross, two figures were just visible. They came nearer and nearer. One was that of Darvell, broad-shouldered and heavily built, but the other one was small and slender, and had rough yellow hair.

Mrs. Darvell was a woman of decisive action as well as of a quick tongue. One look was enough for her. She immediately took off her pattens, which had iron rings to them, and were not adapted for rapid movement, and placed them quickly and quite unconsciously in the vicar's arms as he stood beside her.

"Bless you, sir!" she said.

Before he had realized his situation she had flown down the road, reached the two figures,

and enveloped Frank in her embrace, Darvell standing by meanwhile with a broad smile on his fair and foolish countenance.

The neighbours gathered round the group, and all the dogs, and pigs, and chickens belonging to the settlement also drew near. Jack Gunn's donkey looked over the hedge, his furry ears showing a pointed interest in the affair, and in the distance the vicar surveyed the scene from the cottage door, still holding Mrs. Darvell's pattens.

So Frank had got home again; and after all his wanderings he found that

> "From east to west
> At home is best."

FAITHFUL MOSES.

PART I.

THOSE of you who live near any of the great high-roads that lead to London may remember to have been awake sometimes in the middle of the night, and to have heard the sound of horses' feet, and of cart wheels rumbling slowly and heavily along.

If it be winter, frosty and dry, you hear them very sharply and distinctly; and perhaps you wonder, drowsily, who it is that has business so late, and whither they are bound. "How cold it must be outside!" you think, and it is quite a pleasure to snuggle cosily down in your comfortable bed and feel how warm you are.

Gradually, as the sounds grow less and less, and die away mysteriously in the distance, your

eyes close; soon you are fast asleep again, and that is all you know about the cold, dark night outside.

But Tim, the van-boy, knew a great deal more about it than this, for he had now been "on the road" between Roydon and London for more than a year. The carrier's cart started at eleven o' clock in the morning, and having distributed and received parcels on the way the driver put up his horses at an inn called "The Magpie and Stump," in a part of London named the Borough. So far it was all very well, and not at all hard work; but then came the return journey at night, which began just at the moment when a boy, after a good warm supper, naturally thinks of going to bed. This was trying, and at first Tim felt it a good deal, for he never got home until three o'clock in the morning; he was so anxious, too, to do his duty and fill his post well, that he would not have closed his eyes for the world, though he might well have taken a nap without anyone's knowledge. His "mate" as he called him, whose name was Joshua, sat in front driving his two strong black horses, and Tim's place was at the other open end of the van, so that he might keep

his eye on the parcels and prevent their being stolen or lost.

It was a responsible situation he felt for a boy of thirteen, and he meant to do his very best to keep it now that he had been lucky enough to get it; in the far-off future, too, he saw himself no longer the van-boy, but in the proud position now occupied by Joshua as driver, and this he considered, though a lofty, was by no means an unreasonable ambition.

When Tim first began his work it was summer-time, and the nights were so balmy, and soft, and light that it was not so very difficult to keep awake —there seemed so many other things awake too. After they were well out of London, and the horses no longer clattered noisily over the stones, it was like getting into another world. The stars looked brightly down from the clear smokeless sky. Soft little winds blew a thousand flowery scents from over the fields, and sometimes, singing quite close to the road, Tim heard the nightingale. Even Joshua, a gruff man, was affected by the sweet influence of the season, for Tim noticed that he always sang one particular song on fine nights in summer. Joshua's voice

was hoarse from much exposure to weather, but Tim thought he sang with great expression. The words were not easy to follow, because the middle of the verse always became inaudible; but by degrees the boy made out that it was the description of a letter received by a rustic from his sweetheart. It began:

"All *on* a summer's day
As *I* pursued my way."

Then came some lines impossible to hear, and then each verse ended with:

"Com—*men*cing with 'my dearest,'
And con—*clu*ding with her name—"

Joshua's song and the steady tramp, tramp of the horses were sometimes the only sounds disturbing the still night, and Tim, a small erect figure with widely opened eyes, would sit perched on a convenient packing-case at the back of the cart, and listen admiringly.

But the winter! That was another matter. Joshua did not sing then, but kept his teeth clenched, and his head bent, before the sleet, or wind, or driving rain. Then the brightly lighted

London streets seemed cheerful, and much to be preferred to the lonely open country, where the bitter wind swept across the wide fields, and, gathering strength as it came, rushed in among Tim and the parcels. That was hard to bear, but of all kinds of weather, and he knew them all pretty well now, he thought the very worst was a fog. It was not only that it penetrated everywhere, and laid its cold damp finger on everything; but it spread such a thick veil of dreadful mystery over well-known objects. Nothing looked the same. The houses in the streets towered up like giant castles, and if Tim had read fairy tales he might well have fancied them inhabited by ogres. But he had not. He only felt a dim sense of discomfort and fear, as though he were lost in a strange place. Then it was a comfort to know that Joshua was there, almost invisible indeed, but making himself evident by hoarse shouts, now of encouragement to his horses, and now of derision at some luckless driver. Out in the country, when the heavily laden market carts loomed slowly out of the fog as they passed, they had the appearance of being miles up in the air, and as if they must inevitably

topple over. Joshua knew all the carters, not by sight, for he could not see them, but by the time and place he met them on his nightly journey. Tim could reckon pretty well that after he had heard his gruff salutation of "a dark night, mate," repeated a certain number of times, that they must be nearing home, for they always met about the same number of Joshua's friends; as he had no watch this was a comfort to him on the dark nights. Taught by experience, he learned to contrive for himself a sort of Robinson Crusoe hut with the various hampers and boxes, and in this he lay curled round in tolerable comfort, covered with an old horse-cloth; nevertheless, it was often very cold, and then the only consolation was in thinking that Joshua must be cold also. It is always easier to bear things if there is some one to bear them with you—unless you are a hero.

One December evening the carrier's cart was just starting homewards from the door of the Magpie and Stump. Joshua, reins in hand, and closely buttoned up to the chin, stood ready to mount to his perch, saying a few last words to the landlord, who was a crony of his; Tim was

already in his place. From where he sat he could see something which interested and excited him a good deal, and this was an old woman close by who was selling roasted chestnuts. They did look good! So beautifully done, with nice cracks in their brown skins showing just a little bit of the soft yellow nut inside. Tim looked and longed, and fingered a penny in his pocket. How jolly it would be to have a penn-'orth of hot chestnuts to eat on his way home! They would keep his hands warm too. Joshua still talked, there was yet time, he would give himself a treat. He scrambled down from the cart and went up to the old woman, who sat crouched on a stool warming her hands over her little charcoal brazier. She looked a cross old thing, he thought, but she was not, for when he had paid for his chestnuts she picked out an extra fine one and gave it him "for luck," with a kind grin on her wrinkled face. He was turning away with a warm pocketful, when he saw, sitting on the edge of the pavement near, a very poor thin dog, who trembled with cold or fear, and blinked his eyes sorrowfully at the glowing coals. He was not at all a pretty dog, and probably never had

been, even in the days of his prosperity, and these were evidently gone by. He was long-legged and rough-coated, with coarse black hair mingled with yellowish brown, and his large bright eyes had a timid look in them as though he feared ill-treatment; he sat with his thin body drawn together as closely as possible, as if anxious to escape observation.

Tim stood and looked at him, and felt sorry. He was such a very miserable dog, and yet so patient.

"Is he your dog?" he asked the old woman.

"Bless yer 'art, no," she answered. "He's a stray, he is; he'll come and sit there often at nights, and I sometimes give him a mouthful o' supper."

"I suppose he's rare and 'ungry?" pursued Tim.

"He's starving, that's what he is," said the woman, "and he's hurt his leg badly besides. The boys are allers ready to chuck stones at him when they see him prowlin' round. He don't belong to no one."

Tim felt still more sorry; if he had seen the dog before, he thought, he would have bought a "penn'orth" of liver for him instead of the chest-

nuts. Now he could do nothing for him. He looked round at the old woman, who was rocking herself to and fro with crossed arms, and said:

"Shall you give him any supper to-night?"

"Nay," she said with a sort of chuckle; "he's come too late to-night. I've had my supper. There's many a one besides him as has to go supperless."

The dog during this conversation was evidently conscious that he was being noticed, for he trembled more than ever, and gazed up at Tim with his pleading eyes.

"Pore feller, then," said the boy.

The kind voice woke some bygone memory in the animal; it reminded him perhaps of the days when he belonged to somebody, and was treated gently. He got up, slowly reared his poor stiff limbs into a begging attitude, and wagged his short tail. He soon dropped down again, for he was evidently weak, but he looked apologetically from the old woman to Tim, as much as to say:

"I know it was a poor performance, but it was the best I could do. In old days it used to please."

"See there now," said the woman, "someone must a taught him that. Maybe he's bin a Punch's dog."

Tim stood absorbed in thought. He had forgotten Joshua, and the cart, and his own important position as van-boy; one idea filled his mind. Could he, ought he, might he take the dog home with him and have him for his own?

He was a prudent boy, and he considered that he would have to pay a tax for him and feed him out of his wages. "But he could have 'arf my dinner," he reflected; "and how useful he'd be to look after the parcels. And he do look so thin and poor. I'll ask Joshua."

He looked round. Fortunately for him, Joshua and the landlord had entered into a discussion as to the respective merits of warm mashes, and were still engaged upon it, so Tim had not been missed. He went up to the two men, and standing a little in front of them waited for a convenient moment to make his request. He was glad to see that Joshua looked good-tempered just now; he had evidently had the best of the argument which had been going on, for there was a gleam of triumph in his eye, and he was

repeating some assertion in a loud voice, while the landlord stood in a dejected attitude with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets.

"*That's* where it is," said Joshua as he concluded, and then his eye fell on Tim's eager upturned face.

"Dorg, eh?" he said, when the boy had made him understand what he wanted. "Where is he?"

"There," said Tim, pointing to where the dog still sat shivering near the old chestnut woman.

Joshua gazed at the animal in silence, and sucked a straw which he had in his mouth reflectively. Tim looked anxiously up into his face. Would he take a fancy to him? The landlord had now drawn near, and also an inquisitive ostler. The old chestnut-seller ceased to rock herself to and fro, and turned her head towards the group, so that the dog, so lonely a few minutes ago, had suddenly become a centre of interest. He seemed to wonder at this, but he scarcely moved his eyes, with a mute appeal in them, from his first friend, Tim. At last, after what seemed an immense silence, Joshua spoke.

"He ain't a beauty—not to look at," he said.

This might have sounded discouraging to anyone who did not know Joshua, but it was rather the reverse to Tim.

"He'd be werry useful in the cart," he suggested, taking care not to appear too anxious.

But now the landlord, feeling it time to offer his opinion, broke into the discussion.

"There's no doubt, as the boy says, that you'd find a dog useful, but I wouldn't have a brute of a cur like that, if I was you. Now I could give you as pretty a pup to bring up to the business as you could wish to see. A real game un. Death to anything reasonable he'd be in a year's time. Them nasty mongrels is never no good."

Now this adverse opinion was, strange to say, sufficient to make up Joshua's mind in the dog's favour; he always took a contrary view of things to the landlord on principle, because it encouraged conversation, and this habit was so strong that he at once began to see the special advantages of a mongrel.

"He's a werry faithful creetur, is a mongrel, if he's properly trained," he said slowly and solemnly; "and as to *game*, where's the game he'd find in a carrier's cart? You can bring him along, mate."

Leaving the landlord in a temporarily crushed condition, he walked off to his horses, which stamped impatiently at all this delay. The dog suffered Tim to take him in his arms without any resistance, though he winced a little as if in pain, and the cart presently drove away from the small knot of interested spectators gathered round the inn door. Then, gently examining his new comrade, the boy found that one of his hind-legs was injured, so that he could not put it to the ground, and moaned when it was touched, though he licked Tim's hand immediately afterwards in apology.

"But I don't think it's broke," said the boy encouragingly; "and when we get home I'll bathe it and tie it up, and I dessay I can find yer a bit o' supper."

Soothed perhaps by this prospect, and evidently feeling a sense of comfort and protection, the dog stretched out his thin, weary limbs, and soon, sharing the warm shelter of Tim's horse-cloth, slept profoundly.

And thus the new friends made their first journey together.

PART II.

SO from this time there was a van-dog as well as a van-boy; three "mates" travelling in the cart between Roydon and London—Joshua, Tim, and Moses, for after much consideration that was the name given to the dog.

It was wonderful to see how, after a few weeks of food and kindness, he "plucked up a spirit," as Joshua said. His whole aspect altered, for he now held his ears and tail valiantly erect, and quite a martial gleam appeared in his eye. He still, it is true, limped about on three legs, which is never a dignified attitude for a dog, but he already began to acquire distinct views concerning the parcels and the cart, and was ready to defend them, with hair bristling, and lips fiercely drawn back from glistening white teeth.

"Not a beauty," Joshua had said, and decidedly a mongrel according to the landlord. Nobody could doubt that; but to Tim's eyes Moses wanted no attractions, he was perfect. Many and many a confidence was poured into his small, upright,

attentive ear, as the two sat so close together at the back of the cart; Tim never considered whether he understood or not, but it was such a comfort to tell him about things. The cold nights were comparatively easy to bear, now that he could put his arm round Moses' hairy form and feel that he was warm and comfortable; meals became more interesting, though slighter than they used to be, now that they must be shared by Moses, who watched every morsel with bright expectant eyes. Then he must be taught, and this was not difficult, for ready intelligence and eager affection made him a good scholar; all he wanted was to know what was really required of him. This once understood and successfully performed, what an ecstasy of delight followed on the part of both master and pupil, shown by the former in caresses, and by the latter in excited barks, and short quick rushes among the parcels.

As his education proceeded he learnt to distinguish all the different sounds of Tim's voice, and would sit on guard for any length of time if once told to do so. When on duty in this way, a more conscientious dog could not have been found,

for not even the urgent temptation of a cat-chase could lure him from his post—although, sometimes, a short cry of anguish would be wrung from him at being obliged to forego such a pleasure.

Joshua he regarded with a distant respect, Tim with intense affection, and the landlord of the Magpie and Stump with ill-concealed growls of aversion, though the latter tried to ingratiate himself by savoury offerings of food. Moses would walk stiffly away from him with his tail held very high, and the landlord would laugh sarcastically. "You're a nice sample, you are," he would say, "and as ugly a mongrel as ever I see—"

As time went on, Tim began to place great reliance on the dog's trustworthiness, and to look upon him as quite equal to another boy. He knew that he had only to hold up his finger and say, "Watch, Moses!" and the dog's vigilant attention was secure; trusting in this, therefore, he felt it by no means so necessary as formerly to be very watchful himself, and began to take life much more easily. In the evening, when Joshua stopped to deliver a parcel, Tim would rouse

himself from a comfortable nap, and just murmur, "Watch, Moses!" then woe to anyone who ventured too near Moses and his property.

Now this division of labour, or rather this shifting of responsibility on to another's shoulders, had its bad results, for while the dog improved every day in sharpness and conscientious performance of duty, the boy did the opposite. Tim became somewhat careless and lazy, and though Joshua knew nothing of it, he did not really fill his post half so well as before the dog came; he allowed things to get slack. Now, whether one is a van-boy or a lord-chancellor this is bad, for slackness leads to neglect, and neglect to worse things. You shall hear what happened in Tim's case.

One evening the carrier's cart was standing in a little back street in the Borough waiting for Joshua; he had matters to settle, he told Tim, which might take him an hour or more, and he added:

"Look alive, now, for it's a nasty neighbourhood to be standing about in, and there's some smallish parcels in the cart easy made off with. Don't you let your eye off 'em."

Tim promised, and, taking his seat on the edge of the cart with his legs swinging, whistled to Moses, who was examining the neighbourhood in an interested manner; he at once jumped up beside his master and assumed a gravely watchful and responsible air.

It was not an amusing street, but poor and squalid, full of small lodging-houses, and little dingy shops; very few people were about, and in spite of Joshua's warning no one seemed even to notice the carrier's cart.

Presently there walked slowly by, whistling carelessly, a boy about Tim's own age; he was quite respectably, though poorly dressed, and wore his cap very much on one side with an air of smartness which Tim thought becoming. He stopped and looked at the boy and the dog, and they looked at him, Moses ready to be suspicious, and Tim to be conversational if required.

For some minutes the group remained in silent contemplation, then the new-comer said inquiringly:

"*Yer* dog?"

"Ah," said Tim, nodding his head.

"Up to snuff, ain't he?" said the other boy.

Tim nodded again, this time in a more friendly manner.

"Wot's his name?"

"Moses."

"Yer give it him?"

"Ah."

"Where's yer boss?" (meaning master).

"Yonder," with a backward movement of the head.

The boy leant his back against a lamp-post near, and seemed in no hurry to pursue his journey; Tim was not sorry, for a little conversation beguiled the time, and his remark about Moses showed this to be an intelligent and discerning youth.

"Wot can he do?" he asked presently, still with his eye on the dog.

Tim ran through a list of Moses' acquirements eagerly, and finished up with: "And he can watch the parcels as well as a Christian—he wouldn't let *no one* but me or Joshua *come* nigh 'em, not for anything."

"Wouldn't he now?" said the boy admiringly.

"You try," suggested Tim, anxious to show off Moses' talents.

The stranger came a little nearer, and stretched out his hand as if to touch one of the parcels; he quickly withdrew it, however, for Moses' bristling mane and angry growl were sufficient warnings of his further intentions. Both boys laughed, Tim triumphantly, and he patted the dog with an air of proud proprietorship.

"There's a Punch and Judy playin' in the next street," remarked the stranger, "and they've got a dorg some'at like yours, he's a clever un he is—wouldn't you like to see him?"

"I've seen 'em—scores o' times," said Tim loftily.

"Not such a good un as this, I lay. You come and see. It wouldn't take you not two minutes, and your dog'll watch the things."

"No," said Tim very quickly and decidedly, "I can't leave the cart."

"You don't trust the dog much, then. You've bin humbuggin' about him, I bet."

"That I haven't," said Tim angrily, "I could trust him not to stir for hours."

"I should just like to see yer," sneered the boy—"I don't b'lieve yer dare leave 'im a minute. Well, I wouldn't keep a stupid cur like that!"

The taunt was more than Tim could bear. He

knew that Moses would come triumphantly out of the ordeal, and besides, he would really like to go and see the clever Punch's dog in the next street; Joshua was safe for another half-hour, and the place looked so quiet and deserted. It must be safe. He would go.

He jumped down from the cart, and spoke to Moses in a certain voice:

"Watch, Moses!" he said, pointing to the parcels.

The dog looked wistfully at his master, as though suspecting something wrong or unusual, but he did not attempt to follow him; he lay down with his nose between his paws, his short ears pricked, and his bright eyes keenly observant. Then the two boys set off running down the street together, and were soon out of his sight.

. . . .

Half an hour later, Joshua, his business over, turned into the street where he had left his cart. There it stood still, with the horses' heads turned towards him; but what was that choking savage growl which met his ear? Surely that was Moses' voice, though strangely stifled.

With a hoarsely muttered oath Joshua quickened his pace to a run, stretched out his powerful arm, and seized hold of a boy about Tim's size, who, with several parcels in his arms, was trying in vain to escape. In vain—because, hanging fast on to one leg, with resolute grip and starting fiery eyes, was the faithful Moses. Every separate hair of his rough coat bristled with excitement and rage, his head was bleeding from a wound made by a kick or a blow, and he uttered all the time the half-strangled growls which Joshua had heard.

And where was Tim? Oh, sad falling off! Tim had deserted his post; he had proved less faithful than the dog Moses.

When a few minutes later he came hurrying back breathless, there were no traces of what had happened, except on Joshua's enraged red countenance and Moses' bleeding head. The strange boy, who had so easily beguiled him, had been quickly handed over to a policeman. And there were no parcels missing—thanks to Moses, but not, alas, to Tim.

Disgraced and miserable, he stood before the angry Joshua, silent in the midst of a torrent of

wrathful words. He deserved every one of them. Instant dismissal without a character was all he had to expect, and he waited trembling for his fate. But, behold, an unlooked-for intercessor! Moses, seeing Joshua's threatening attitude and his dear master's downcast face, drew near to help him, and, as was his custom, stood up and put his paw on the boy's arm. Joshua looked at the dog; his silent presence pleaded eloquently in Tim's favour, and the angry tone was involuntarily softened.

"If ever a boy deserved the sack, it's you," he said; "and, as sure as my name's Joshua, you should have it if it wasn't for that dog o' yourn. He's worth a score o' boys, that dog is, for he does his dooty, as well as knows what it is."

Tim breathed again; he flung his arms round Moses' neck, who licked his face eagerly.

"Give us another chance," he cried imploringly, "we'll both work so hard, Moses and me, and I'll never leave the cart again. If you only won't turn us off I'll work without wage ever so long, that I will."

"That, in course, you will," said Joshua grimly, yet relenting, "and you'll get a jolly good thrash-

ing besides. And if you're not turned off you've got the dog to thank."

He got up into his seat as he spoke, and Tim crept thankfully in at the back of the cart with Moses. He had, indeed, "got the dog to thank." Moses had paid his debt of gratitude now; he and Tim were equal.

You will be glad to hear that Tim was not dismissed, and that he used his other "chance" well, for no amount of sharp London boys could have tempted him from his duty again. As for Moses, he was respected and trusted by everyone on the road after this, and Joshua presented him with a collar, whereon were inscribed his name and the date of the memorable fray in which he acquitted himself so well. In spite of these honours, however, all the love of his faithful heart continued to be given to Tim; who, on his part, never forgot how it was and why it was that he had "got the dog to thank."

LIKE A BEAN-STALK.

IT had always been an uncontested fact in the Watson family that Bridget was plain. Even when she was a round toddling thing of five years old, with bright eyes and thick brown curls, aunts and other relations had often said in her presence:

"Bridget is a dear little girl, but she will grow up plain."

Plain! Bridget was quite used to the sound of the word, and did not mind it at all, though she was conscious that it meant something to be regretted, because people always said "but" before it. "A good child, but plain." "A sweet-tempered little thing, but plain."

However, it did not interfere with any pleasure or advantage that Bridget could see. She could run faster than most of her brothers and sisters,

who were *not* plain but pretty; she could climb a tree very well indeed, with her stout little legs, and she could say a great many verses of poetry by heart. Besides, she felt sure that Toto the black poodle, and Samson the great cat, and all the other pets, loved her as well as the rest, and perhaps even better. So she did not mind being plain at all, until she was about thirteen years old and the new governess came.

Now about this time Bridget, who had hitherto been a compact sturdy child, short for her age, began to grow in the most alarming manner; the "Bean-stalk," her brothers called her, and one really could almost believe she had shot up in a night, the growth was so sudden. Her arms and legs seemed to be everywhere, always sprawling about in a spider-like manner in unexpected places, so that she very often either swept things off the table or tripped somebody up. Her mother looking round on the children at their dinner hour would say:

"My *dear* Bridget, I believe you have grown an inch since yesterday! How very short those sleeves are for you!" and then there was a general chuckle at the poor "Bean-stalk."

Then visitors would come, and Bridget with the others would be sent for to the drawing-room; entering in gawky misery she well knew what sentence would first strike her ear, and would try furtively to shelter herself in the background. No use!

"My dear Mrs. Watson," the lady would cry, with an expression of amused pity on her face, "how your daughter Bridget has grown! Why, she is as tall as my girl of eighteen;" etc. etc.

Bridget got tired of it at last, and she very much dreaded the arrival of the new governess, because she felt sure that she should be so "bullied," as the boys said, about her height and awkwardness. She would cheerfully have sacrificed several inches of her arms and legs to be comfortably short, but this could not be managed, so she must make the best of it.

Miss Tasker arrived. Bobbie saw her first, from an advantageous post he had taken up for the purpose amongst the boughs of a large beech-tree in front of the house.

He saw her cab drive up with boxes on the top, and Toto dancing round and round it on the tips of his toes barking loudly, which I am sorry

to say was his reprehensible manner of receiving strangers. Bobbie parted the boughs a little more. It was a situation full of interest. Would she be frightened of Toto? He felt a good deal depended on this as a sign of her future behaviour.

It appeared, however, that Miss Tasker was not afraid of dogs, for a tall thin figure presently descended from the cab in the midst of Toto's wildest demonstrations. Bobbie felt an increased respect for the new governess, but meanwhile the "others" must at once be told the result of his observations, and as she entered the house he slipped down from his perch and scudded quickly away to find them.

From this time Bridget's troubles increased tenfold; Miss Tasker had severe views about deportment, and besides this her attention was specially directed by Mrs. Watson to Bridget's awkwardness.

"I am particularly anxious," she said, "about my daughter Bridget, and other lessons are really not of so much importance just now as that she should learn to hold herself properly. As it is, she is so clumsy in her movements that I almost tremble to see her enter the room."

Poor Bridget! Her usual manner of entering a room was with her head eagerly thrust forward, and her long arms swinging; that was when she was quite comfortable and unselfconscious, but all this must be changed now, and to achieve this Miss Tasker devised an ingenious method of torture, which was practised every morning. It was this. Lessons began at ten o'clock, at which time the children were expected to assemble in the school-room, but now, instead of running in any how, they had to go through the following scene.

Miss Tasker sat at her desk ready to receive each pupil with a gracious smile and bow; then one by one they entered with a solemn bow or curtsy and said, "Good morning, Miss Tasker."

"I call it humbug," remarked the outspoken Bobbie, "as if we hadn't seen her once already at breakfast-time."

How Bridget hated this ordeal!

To know that Miss Tasker was waiting there ready to fix a keen gray eye on her deficiencies, and that she would probably say when the curtsy was done:

"Once again, Bridget, and remember to *round* the elbows."

How to round your elbows when they naturally stuck out like knitting-pins, Bridget could not conceive, and I am afraid that, pushed to desperation, she soon left off even trying, and so became more awkward than ever.

But the ceremony once over, and lessons begun, Miss Tasker had no cause for complaint, for Bridget was a ready and ambitious pupil. She had a good memory, and being an imaginative child, it was a special pleasure to her to learn poetry, in repeating which she would quite forget herself and her awkwardness and pour forth page after page without a single mistake.

At such times, Miss Tasker's chill remarks of "Your shoulders, Bridget"—"Don't poke, Bridget," generally fell on unheeding ears, but there was one occasion on which Bridget did feel them to be especially trying and out of place.

She had been learning one of the "Lays of Ancient Rome," and was now repeating it all through. In proud consciousness of not having missed one word, and in full enjoyment of the swing of the poetry, she stood with her head thrust forward and her chin in the air:

"So he spake, and speaking sheathed
His good sword by his side,
And with his armour on his back
Plunged headlong in the tide!
No sound of——"

"My *dear* Bridget, draw in your chin," said the cold voice, and poor Bridget, dropping suddenly down from the heights of heroic deeds to dreary commonplace, felt that this was hard indeed.

She had said it all without a mistake, and the only thing that seemed to matter was how her chin, or her shoulders, or her arms looked. It was unkind. It was unfair. It was too bad. She could not help being awkward, and as they worried her so about it, she should not try to be any different.

From this time forward she would be just herself—plain, awkward Bridget. So she resolved as she took the book back from Miss Tasker, and sat down sullenly in her place, and so she continued to resolve as several days went on. You know how, when one has once begun to be a little naughty, everything that happens seems to increase the feeling, and so it was with

Bridget; everything Miss Tasker said, or did, or even looked after this, made her feel more and more ill-used and injured, till one unfortunate day brought matters to a climax.

If there was one day in the week that Bridget disliked more than another at this time it was Thursday, for Thursday was "dancing-day." It would be hard to give you an idea of how much misery that meant to her, or how fervently she used to pray for something to happen to prevent her going to the class, which was held at a friend's house some miles away. A sprained ankle, or a slight earthquake, not bad enough to hurt anyone, were among her usual aspirations, but nothing of the kind ever occurred, and she was borne away with her brothers and sisters by the relentless Miss Tasker to the scene of torture; the suffering of martyrs, whom she had read about, were, in Bridget's opinion, not worthy of mention beside those to be endured at a dancing-class.

Everything seemed to go wrong on this particular day, perhaps because she did not try to make them go right, and at last, after the whole class had been practising a step together, the dancing-mistress said rather severely:

"I wish Miss Bridget Watson to do the minuet steps alone: all the others may sit down."

With downcast eyes, and one shoulder pushed nervously up, Bridget stood alone in the middle of the room. She felt that thousands of eyes, like the little sharp pricks of so many needles, were transfixing her luckless figure, for there were a good many lady visitors present besides the children.

"Now, if you please, Miss Watson. Straighten the shoulders. Take the dress gracefully between fingers and thumb Raise the head. One—two—three—begin!"

The music played. Bridget was intensely nervous, but through it all she felt a perverse pleasure in irritating Miss Tasker, so she performed some grotesquely uncouth steps which raised a smile on almost every face.

"Again, if you please."

It was done again, and if possible worse than before.

"You may return to your seat."

Which Bridget did with swift ungainly strides, feeling covered with disgrace, and as she passed,

an unfortunate whisper from one of the visitors reached her ear:

"What a windmill of a child to be sure!"

She plunged into her seat, her eyes wet with tears of mortification, but no one saw them except Bobbie, who sat next her. He did not understand the full extent of her distress, but he looked up in her face and put his small hand in hers. It was a sympathetic but sticky clasp, for Bobbie always carried sweets in his pockets for solace at odd moments, yet it comforted Bridget a little, and she gave it a silent squeeze in return.

But, hurt and sore and angry as she felt, the cup was not quite full until that evening, when Mrs. Watson came into the school-room while the children were having tea. After her usual little chat with them she said just before going away:

"I am sorry to hear from Miss Tasker that Bridget does not seem to think it worth while to take pains with her dancing, though she knows how anxious I am about it."

She looked at Bridget, who blushed hotly, but made no answer; and, indeed, she could not, for

she felt as though Bobbie's largest ball were sticking in her throat.

"I know," continued her mother, "that you cannot all do the same things equally well, but you can at least try to do your best, however much you may dislike any particular lesson. I should be more pleased to know that Bridget tried to hold herself upright and took pains with her dancing, than to hear that she had said all her lessons quite perfectly, because I know one is a difficulty to her and the other none."

Mother looked very grave, and she so seldom reproved any of the children, that they felt this to be a solemn occasion, and their little serious faces were all turned upon Bridget.

She could not bear it. As her mother left the room she started up abruptly, upsetting her cup and saucer, and, heedless of Miss Tasker's warning voice, rushed out into the garden blinded with her tears.

She must go somewhere and cry alone, and her steps turned instinctively to the well-known refuge of "the barn," an old out-building which the children had turned into a playground of

their own; it was otherwise disused, excepting that now and then some trusses of hay or straw were put there, and it was a most splendid place to keep pets in.

A numerous and motley family lived here in cages and hutches of all kinds, generally made out of old packing-cases. There was a large colony of white rats, two dormice named Paul and Silas, a jackdaw, rabbits, and a little yellow owl, not to mention the pigeons who fluttered in and out through the open door at will. They came whirling round Bridget now as she entered and settled on her shoulders and head, and pecked boldly at her shoes expecting to be fed. All the different little creatures in cages roused themselves too, and gave signs that they knew her in their various ways—by small scratching noises, by ruffling of feathers, and tiny squeaks. The jackdaw, who was free, at once came down from the rafters, and, standing before her in slim elegance, raised his blue-gray crest and said "Jark," the only word he knew. They all gave their little welcome.

But Bridget could not take any notice of them to-day, her heart was too full, though she felt

with a dim sense of comfort that these were people to whom her awkwardness made no difference. Otherwise the world was all against her—Miss Tasker, the dancing mistress, and now, to crown all, mother! She threw herself down on some trusses of straw at the end of the barn, and the tears which had made her eyes smart so all day flowed freely. It was so unjust! that was what hurt her so. If she had been naughty she would be sorry, that would be different. But she could not feel that she was in fault at all. It was just because she was plain and awkward that they were all unkind to her, so she whispered to herself, and cried on.

The barn was very quiet, only Bridget's sobs mingled with the cooing of the pigeons and the rustling noises in the cages round. One slanting ray from the setting sun lay on the floor, but the corner where Bridget had thrown herself was in dusky shadow.

And presently a strange thing happened.

"Bridget! Bridget!" said a little husky voice.

Bridget raised herself on her elbow, and looked round astonished. She did not know the

voice at all; and it sounded muffled, as though coming through a heap of feathers.

"Bridget! Bridget!" it said again.

This time it plainly came from the rafters over Bridget's head. She looked up, but there was nothing there except the little yellow owl, who was sitting in his cage, with his eyes very round and bright.

"How wise you look!" said Bridget aloud; "I wish you could help me."

What was her astonishment when the owl at once replied, in the same stifled voice:

"What do you want?"

Bridget paused. What *did* she want? Then she remembered that as the owl could talk, it must certainly be a fairy, and could do anything, so she said:

"I want to be very graceful."

The owl did not answer immediately, and Bridget kept a watchful eye on her arms and legs, almost expecting them to be changed into models of grace at once. Nothing of the sort happened, however; and the owl sat as though in deep thought. At last it said:

"I can tell you a way, but it is difficult."

"I don't care how difficult it is," cried Bridget, now very much excited, "if you will only tell me what it is I will do it."

"Try," said the owl solemnly.

"Try what?" asked Bridget anxiously.

"Try," repeated the owl, "nothing more; try."

Bridget's face fell; she was very much disappointed. Every one had told her that till she was sick of the word. The owl could not be a fairy after all.

"Is that all?" she said. "I always do that."

"Always?" asked the owl.

Bridget was silent a moment as she thought of the past week.

"Why, not *quite* always."

"But it must be always," said the owl, "that's the secret of it. If at *first* you don't succeed, try, try, try again. You've heard that?"

"Of course I have," said Bridget sorrowfully; "I've heard it much too often."

The owl did not answer, perhaps it was offended.

"Can it be possible," thought Bridget, "that I really haven't tried enough?"

Just then something cold and moist was thrust

into her hand, and she started up bewildered, hardly able for the moment to make out where she was. It was almost dark in the barn now, but presently she made out the form of Toto the poodle, who had come to look for his mistress, and now stood with his eager affectionate eyes fixed on her from under his frizzled black hair.

Bridget stretched out her arms to him, and leaning forward, kissed his shaven nose; she felt wonderfully better, and looked up at the owl to thank it for its advice. It sat there blinking as though it had never spoken in its life.

"But you did, you know," she said nodding at it, and she got up and ran out of the barn with Toto springing round her.

She thought a good deal afterwards of what the owl had said, and came to the conclusion that perhaps she had been a good deal in fault. At anyrate she would "try again" and see how it answered. Bridget was a resolute little character, and she took the matter in hand at once; but I can best tell you how it "answered" by describing a scene which took place a month later, on the last dancing day before the holidays.

The lesson was over, and the mistress was

taking leave of her pupils; the usual visitors sat round the room looking on.

"And now," she said, "before we part, I must say a few special words about one of my pupils, and that is, Miss Bridget Watson, whose marked improvement during the past month I have been pleased to notice. I have always felt that she had great difficulties to contend with, for when young people are growing fast, it is not easy to manage the limbs gracefully. I have to congratulate her upon her efforts, and to hope that you will all follow her example in trying to do your best."

There was a murmur of satisfaction, for Bridget was a general favourite among her companions and they were all pleased to hear her praised. Every one was pleased; Miss Tasker, who was fond of Bridget, beamed behind her spectacles, and carried home the good news to Mrs. Watson, whose pleasure put a finishing touch to Bridget's exultation. Indeed, for some minutes she was more like a windmill than ever, through excess of joy, but it was holiday time, and even Miss Tasker said nothing.

You all know the story of the "Ugly Duck-

ling," and how, after all, it became a beautiful white swan. I cannot say whether, in like manner, Bridget grew up to be graceful and pretty, but one thing I am certain of, and that is, that she never regretted following the owl's advice to "try again."

ALL ALONE!

NAN was the youngest but one of the little Beresfords, and she was six years old when the baby came, so she was quite a responsible person and ready to be a great help to nurse. Her round face and form assumed airs of dignity, and she strove valiantly to put away all babyish weaknesses as things of the past.

But some of them were too strong for Nan, struggle as she would, and she found to her dismay that though she was six years old, and "baby" no longer, she was still afraid of the dark.

It had always been a dreadful moment to her when, leaving the cheerful nursery, she must be tucked up in her little bed and see nurse take away the candle. She would lie and stare with her bright round eyes into the thick blackness,

and feel grateful if she could fix them on any little faint thread of light coming through chink or crevice. She could not have told you what it was she feared, and perhaps this was the reason why she never spoke of it to anyone—not even to mother. Besides, in the bright morning light she forgot her fears, and being naturally a cheerful and courageous child would have been ashamed to mention them. In a large family children are not encouraged to make too much of their troubles, for there is not time to attend to them; so no one knew that merry little Nan, who was afraid of nothing by daylight or candle-light, often lay awake at night long after she should have been asleep, and felt very much afraid indeed.

And now I am going to tell you how on one occasion Nan conquered her fears all by herself, with no help from anyone on earth; and you must remember that it is a far braver thing to do what one is told in spite of being afraid, than not to be afraid at all.

At Ripley, which was the next village to that in which Mr. Beresford, Nan's father, was rector, lived Squire Chorley, who had a large family of boys and girls. They were fond of getting up

concerts, and theatricals, and readings for the poor people, and in all these things the Beresfords were always asked over to help. And one Christmas holidays there was to be an unusually grand entertainment given by the children, which included a display of "Mrs. Jarley's Wax-works."

Nan would listen with absorbing interest to the discussion about who should represent the different characters in wax-work, and she was allowed to be present at the rehearsals, but there was no question of such a little thing taking a part. She thought all the figures very beautiful, especially Joan of Arc, who was dressed in splendid tinsel armour and a crimson skirt, and was seated on a spotted rocking-horse. When she gracefully waved her sword Nan could hardly believe that it really was her own sister Sophy, and afterwards when she read about Joan of Arc in the history of England she always fancied her looking just like that, with long fair hair streaming down her back.

There were a great many figures, as many as the stage would hold. And, as it was the first time the wax-works had been attempted, the children were particularly anxious that it should

go off well, and that the dresses should be especially brilliant. So everyone worked hard, and Nan did her utmost to help, and was as excited about it as anyone.

The evening before the performance there was to be a dress-rehearsal on the stage which the carpenter had put up in the school-room, and six excited little Beresfords were packed into the wagonette with the German governess, and driven over to Ripley. Fräulein was rather excited too, for she was to sing a song in an interval of the performance, and also to represent the Chinese giant in the wax-works.

But when they reached the village school-room they found the other members of the company in low spirits, for they had received a blow. Johnnie Chorley, who was to have been "Jack-in-the-box," had so bad a cold that he was not to play.

"I knew how it would be," said Agatha, the eldest girl, despondingly, "when Johnnie wouldn't change his boots yesterday. And now there will be no Jack-in-the-box; and it was one of the best."

"Can't someone else take it?" said Tom Beresford, looking round.

"No one small enough for the tub," was the answer; "Johnnie is such a mite, and made such good faces."

Nan's heart beat fast. It was on her lips to say, "I am small enough," but she did not dare. She only pushed herself a little in front, and stared up at Tom and Agatha with solemn, longing eyes.

The former, a tall boy of fifteen, who was stage-manager on these occasions, stood whistling in a perplexed manner, and his eyes fell on the compact little figure in front of him.

"Hallo!" he said suddenly, "I have it. Here's your Jack!"

He took Nan up and stood her on a form near.

"What, Nan?" said all the voices in different tones, and everyone looked at her critically.

Nan stood quite quietly, with her cheeks very red, and her eyes glistening, and her hands tucked into her little muff. She was so afraid that they would say she could not do it, and she felt so sure that she could. But it was settled that she might at least try; and, oh delightful moment! she was lifted into the barrel, which

was very cold and smelt of beer, and told what was expected of her.

"You know, Nan," said Tom, "that you are not to show the least little bit of your head until you hear Mrs. Jarley winding you up, and then you must pop up suddenly, and make a nice little funny face as you have seen Johnnie do."

Now, Nan was a most observant child, and had taken careful notes of Johnnie's performance, which she very much admired; so, although her heart beat very quickly, she bobbed up just at the right minute with such a comical expression that there was a burst of applause, and "Well done, Nan!" from the company.

Happy Nan! They put a scarlet cloak on her, very full in the neck, and a queer little tow wig with a top-knot, and painted a red patch on each cheek; and there she was, a member of the wax-works, and the happiest little soul in the county.

She was to be a wax-work! The honour was almost too much, and the only drawback was poor Johnnie's disappointment. She thought of that, driving home that evening, and was so quiet that Fräulein thought she was asleep, but

she was only resolving that she would offer Johnnie her spotted guinea-pig to make up.

So the eventful evening came, and everything was wonderfully successful; Mrs. Jarley's wax-works was considered the best thing that had been seen in the village for years, and everyone laughed very much. Nan did her very best to make a good Jack, and though she got very cramped in the tub, before her turn came to be exhibited, she made some most agile springs, and was heartily applauded. Then the Vicar of Ripley made a speech and thanked the performers, and all the people cheered, and then everyone, including the wax-works, sang "God save the Queen," and the entertainment was over.

There was a great bustling and chattering afterwards in the green-room, where the actors were trying to find cloaks and shawls and hats, for they were all to go to Mr. Chorley's to supper, and no one seemed able to get hold of the right things.

Fräulein was fussing about her overshoes which she had lost, and there was a general struggle and confusion. Nan stood in a corner in her quaint little dress, waiting for someone to

wrap her up, and at last her sister Sophy saw her.

"Why! there you are, you quiet little Nan," she said, "I will find your hood if I can. Here it is, and here is a shawl." She bundled the child up warmly, and kissed her. "You were a jolly little Jack," she went on, "and now you are to go home with cousin Annie and sleep at her house to-night. Run into the school-room and find her."

Cousin Annie was the Vicar of Ripley's wife, and had a little girl of Nan's own age, so it was a great treat to stay with her. Nan poked her way among the people who were still standing about in the school-room chatting together before they dispersed, but she could not see anyone she knew. Then she waited a long while at the door, but there was no cousin Annie, she had evidently gone home. Nan peeped out. Down the road which led to Mr. Chorley's she heard distant voices and laughter, and saw the twinkling light of lanterns, but in the opposite direction it was all quite dark and silent, and that was the way to cousin Annie's. She knew it as well as possible, and it was not very far, quite a short distance,

in the *daylight*—you had only to go down the lane, and turn a little to the right, and go in at the white gate near the pond. A very simple matter in the daytime; but now! Nan stepped back into the room; she would go and tell them that cousin Annie had gone, and then someone would go with her. But to her dismay she found the green-room dark and silent; they had all gone out by the other door without coming through the school-room, and Nan was alone. She stood irresolute, clutching the heavy shawl which Sophy had wrapped round her, and feeling half inclined to cry. There was only one thing to do now, and that was to go down the dark lane all by herself. Nan had been brought up in habits of the most simple obedience, and it never occurred to her to question any order. "You are to go to cousin Annie's," Sophy had said, so of course she must go.

She choked down a little sob, and pulled open the door again, and trotted out into the darkness. Her heavy shawl rather impeded her, so she could not go very fast, and the road was rough and uneven for her small feet. She looked up to see if she could find any comfortable twink-

ling star for a companion, but the sky was all black and overcast, and there was no moon. Then she said her evening prayer to herself, but it was very short and did not last long, and then all the hymns she knew, and then all the texts, and by that time she was nearly at the bottom of the lane, when, oh misfortune! she caught her foot in the dangling end of the big shawl and fell flat in the mud. It was very hard to keep back the tears after that; but she gathered herself up as well as she could and stumbled on, until at last she passed through the white gate, which stood open, and reached the front door of the Vicarage. But her troubles were not over yet, for she found that, even by standing on the very tips of her toes, she could reach neither bell nor knocker. She rapped as hard as she could with her soft little knuckles, but they made no more noise on the great door than a bird's beak would have done; and then she tried some little kicks, but no one came.

She felt very lonely and miserable with the black night all round her, and it seemed to make it worse to think of her brothers and sisters enjoying themselves so much at Mr. Chorley's.

How sorry they would be for Nan if they knew! and then she felt so sorry for herself, that she was obliged to sit down on the stone steps and cry. She was hungry, as well as frightened and cold, for she had been much too excited to eat anything at tea-time, and now it was past ten o'clock. Oh to be in her little white bed at home! She cuddled herself up as close to the door as she could, and laid her cheek against it, shrinking back from the darkness which seemed to press against her, and presently, how it came to pass she never knew, her head began to nod and she went fast to sleep.

The next thing she remembered was hearing a voice say, quite close to her: "Why, it's little Nan! how did the child get here?" And then someone took her up, and carried her with strong arms into a warm room with bright lights. And then she found herself on cousin Annie's knee, and saw people standing round asking eager questions and looking very much amused. And no wonder, for Nan was a very funny-looking little bundle indeed, in spite of her woe-begone appearance; her round face was streaked with mud, and tears, and scarlet paint, and the odd

little wig had fallen over one eye in a waggish manner. When the hood and shawl were taken off, a more disconsolate little Jack-in-the-box could hardly be imagined, for what with hunger, fatigue, and the comfort of feeling cousin Annie's kind arms round her, Nan's tears fell fast and she could not stop them.

They could just make out between her sobs something about "Sophy" and "sleeping," but that was all; and at last cousin Annie said, "Never mind, darling, you shall tell me all about it by and by." And then poor little weary Nan was carried upstairs, and washed, and put to bed, and cousin Annie brought her some supper, and sat by her until she dropped gently off to sleep.

It turned out afterwards that Fräulein in the excitement of the moment had forgotten to deliver the message about Nan, so that none expected her at the Vicarage. When she went home the next day Tom said she was quite a "little heroine." Nan did not know what that meant, but she was sure it was something pleasant.

And the best of it all was, that after this adventure Nan never felt so frightened of the dark again. But that she kept to herself.

PENELOPE'S NEEDLEWORK.

ONE of the greatest trials of Penelope's life when she was ten years old was music, and the other, needlework; she could not see any possible use in learning either of them, and none of the arguments put forward by nurse, governess, or mother, made the least impression on her mind. It was especially hard, she thought, that she had to go on with music, because Ralph, her younger brother, had been allowed to leave off. "Won't you have pity on me, and let me leave off too?" she asked her mother one day imploringly. But mother, though she was touched by the pleading face, and though Penelope's music lessons were household afflictions, thought it better to be firm.

"You see, darling," she said, "that now you have got on so much further than Ralph it would

be a pity to leave off. You have broken the back of it."

"Ah, no," sighed poor Penelope, "it's broken the back of me."

And then the needlework! Could there be a duller, more unsatisfactory occupation? Particularly if your stitches *would* always look crooked and straggling, and when the thimble hurt your finger, and the needle got sticky, and the thread broke when you least expected it. It was quite as bad as music in its way. Penelope would sigh wearily over her task, and envy the people in the Waverley novels, who, she felt sure, never sewed seams or had music lessons.

For the Waverley novels were Penelope's favourite books, and she asked nothing better than to curl herself up in some corner with one of the volumes, and to be left alone.

Then, once plunged into the adventures of "Ivanhoe," or "Quentin Durward," or the hero of "The Talisman," her troubles vanished.

She followed her hero in all his varying fortunes, and was present at his side in battle; she saw him struggling against many foes, fighting for the poor and weak, meeting treachery

with truth, and falsehood with faithfulness; she heard the clash of his armour, and watched his good sword flash in the air at the tournament; she trembled for him when he was sore wounded, and rejoiced with him when, after many a hard-won fray, he was rewarded by the hand of his lady love. Those were days indeed! There was something quite remarkably flat and stupid in sitting down to hem a pocket-handkerchief when you had just come from the tourney at Ashby de la Zouche, or in playing exercises and scales while you were still wondering whether King Louis XI. *would* hang the astrologer or not.

Penelope loved all her books. She had a shelf of her own in the playroom quite full of them, but the joy and pride of her heart were the Waverley novels, which her father had given her on her last birth-day.

It was a great temptation to her to spend all her pocket-money in buying new books, but she knew this would have been selfish, so she had made the following arrangement. She kept two boxes, one of which she called her "charity-box," and into this was put the half of any money she had given to her; this her mother helped her to

spend in assisting any poor people who specially needed it The money in the other box was saved up until there was enough to buy a new book, but this did not occur very often. Penelope liked it all the better when it did, for, though she could read some stories over and over again with pleasure, they did not all bear constant study equally well, in some cases, she told her mother, "it was like trying to dry your face on a wet towel."

One morning Penelope, or "Penny," as she was generally called, was sitting in the nursery window-seat with a piece of sewing in her hands, it seemed more tiresome even than usual, for there was no one in the room but nurse, and she appeared too busy for any conversation. Penny had tried several subjects, but had received such short absent answers that she did not feel encouraged to proceed, so there was nothing to beguile the time, and she frowned a good deal and sighed heavily at intervals. At last she looked up in despair.

"What *can* you be doing, nurse?" she said, "and why are you looking at all those old things of mine and Nancy's?"

Nurse did not answer. She held out a little shrunken flannel dress at arm's-length between herself and the light and scanned it critically, then she put it on one side with some other clothes and took up another garment to examine with equal care. Penny repeated her question, and this time nurse heard it.

"I'm just looking out some old clothes for poor Mrs. Dicks," she said.

"Do you mean *our* Mrs. Dicks?" asked Penny. "What does she want clothes for?"

"Well, Miss Penny," said nurse, proceeding to look through a pile of little stockings, "when a poor woman's lost her husband, and is left with six children to bring up on nothing, she's glad of something to clothe them with."

Penny felt interested. "Our Mrs. Dicks" had been her mother's maid, and after she married the children had often been to visit her, and considered her a great friend. Sometimes they went to tea with her, and once she had given Nancy, Penny's second sister, a lovely fluffy kitten.

Penny was fond of Mrs. Dicks, and it seemed dreadful to think that she must now bring up six children on nothing. She felt, however,

that she must inquire into the thing a little more.

"Why must she bring up her six children on nothing?" she asked, letting her work fall into her lap.

"Because," said nurse shortly, "she hasn't got any money or anyone to work for her. But if I were you, Miss Penny, I'd get on with my needlework, and not waste time asking so many questions."

"Well," said Penny, making fruitless attempts to thread her needle, "I suppose mother will help her to get some money. I shall ask her to let me give her some out of the charity-box—only I'm afraid there isn't much in it now."

"If you really wanted to help her," said nurse, who saw an excellent opportunity for making a useful suggestion, "you might make some things for her baby; she hasn't much time for sewing, poor soul."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that," said Penny decidedly, "because, you know, I hate needlework so. I couldn't do any extra, it would take all my time."

Nurse rolled up a tight bundle of clothes and left the room without answering, and Penny,

with her frowning little face bent over her work, went on thinking about Mrs. Dicks and her six children. She wondered whether they had enough to eat now; if they were to be brought up on nothing, they probably had not, she thought, and she felt anxious to finish her task that she might run and ask mother about it, and how she could best help with the money out of the charity-box. So she cobbled over the last stitches rather hastily, and put the work away; but she found after all that her mother was too busy to attend to her just then. The next step, therefore, was to ascertain the state of the charity-box, and she took it down from the mantel-piece in the play-room and gave it a little shake. It made quite a rich sound; but Penny knew by experience what a noise coppers can make, so she was not very hopeful as she unscrewed the top and looked in. And matters were even worse than she feared, for all the box contained was this: two pennies, one halfpenny, and one stupid little farthing. Penny felt quite angry with the farthing, for it was bright and new, and looked at the first glance almost like gold.

"If you were a fairy farthing," she said, "you'd get yourself changed into gold on purpose to help Mrs. Dicks; but it's no use waiting for that."

That afternoon Penny was to go out with her mother, instead of walking with the other school-room children and the governess. It was a great honour and delight, and she had saved up so many questions to ask about various subjects that she had scarcely time to tell her about Mrs. Dicks and the state of the charity-box.

They had just begun to talk about it, when Mrs. Hawthorne stopped at a house near their own home.

"Oh, mother!" cried Penny in some dismay, "are we going to see Mrs. Hathaway?"

"Yes," answered her mother, "she has promised to show me her embroideries, and I think you will like to see them too."

Penny did not feel at all sure about that, she was rather afraid of Mrs. Hathaway, who was a severe old lady, noted for her exquisite needlework; however, it was a treat to go anywhere with mother, even to see Mrs. Hathaway.

The embroideries were, indeed, very beautiful,

and exhibited with a good deal of pride, while Penny sat in modest silence listening to the conversation. She privately regarded Mrs. Hathaway's handiwork with a shudder, and thought to herself, "How very little time she must have for reading!"

Scarcely any notice had been taken of her yet; but presently, when everything had been shown and admired, Mrs. Hathaway turned her keen black eyes upon her, and said:

"And this little lady, now, is she fond of her needle?"

A sympathetic glance passed between Mrs. Hawthorne and Penny, but she knew she must answer for herself, and she murmured shyly though emphatically:

"Oh, *no*."

"No! indeed," said Mrs. Hathaway, "and why not?"

She was a very upright old lady, and when she said this she sat more upright than ever, and fixed her eyes on Penny's face.

Penny felt very uncomfortable under this gaze, and wriggled nervously, but she could find nothing better to say than,

"Because I *hate* it so."

"I am afraid," put in Mrs. Hawthorne, "that Penny doesn't quite understand the importance of being able to sew neatly; just now she thinks of nothing but her books, but she will grow wiser in time, and become a clever needlewoman, I hope."

Mrs. Hathaway had not taken her eyes off Penny with a strong expression of disapproval; she evidently thought her a very ill brought-up little girl indeed. Now she turned to Mrs. Hawthorne and said:

"I question whether all this reading and study is an advantage to the young folks of the present day. I do not observe that they are more attractive in manner than in the time I remember, when a young lady was thought sufficiently instructed if she could sew her seam and read her Bible."

She turned to Penny again and continued: "Now, the other day I heard of a society which I think you would do well to join. It is a working society, and the members, who are some of them as young as you are, pledge themselves to work for half an hour every day. At the end of

the year their work is sent to the infant Africans, and thus they benefit both themselves and others. Would you like to join it?"

"Oh, *no*, thank you," said Penny in a hasty but heartfelt manner.

"Why not?"

"Because I never could fulfil that promise. I shouldn't like to belong to that society at all. I don't know the Africans, and if I work, I'd rather work for Mrs. Dicks." Penny spoke so quickly that she was quite out of breath.

"And who, my dear child," said Mrs. Hathaaway, surprised at Penny's vehemence, "is Mrs. Dicks?"

She spoke quite kindly, and her face looked softer, so Penny was emboldened to tell her about the whole affair, and how Mrs. Dicks was a very nice woman, and had six children to bring up on nothing.

"I wanted to help her out of the charity-box," concluded Penny, "but there's scarcely anything in it."

Mrs. Hathaway looked really interested, and Penny began to think her rather a nice old lady after all. After she and her mother left the

house she walked along for some time in deep thought.

"What are you considering, Penny?" asked Mrs. Hawthorne at last.

"I think," said Penny very deliberately, "that as there's so little in the charity-box I should like to work for Mrs. Dicks' children."

Mrs. Hawthorne knew what an effort this resolve had cost her little daughter.

"Well, dear Penny," she answered, "if you do that I think you will be giving her a more valuable gift than the charity-box full of money."

"Why?" said Penny.

"Because you will give her what costs you most. It is quite easy to put your hand in your box and take out some money; but now, besides the things you make for her, you will have to give her your patience and your perseverance, and also part of the time you generally spend on your beloved books."

"So I shall!" sighed Penny.

But she kept her resolve and did work for Mrs. Dicks. Very unpleasant she found it at first, particularly when there was some interesting new story waiting to be read.

Gradually, however, there came a time when it did not seem quite so disagreeable and difficult, and she even began to feel a little pride in a neat row of stitches.

The day on which she finished a set of tiny shirts for the baby Dicks was one of triumph to herself, and of congratulation from the whole household; Mrs. Dicks herself was almost speechless with admiration at Miss Penny's needlework; indeed the finest embroideries, produced by the most skilful hand, could not have been more praised and appreciated.

"Penny," said Mrs. Hawthorne, "have you looked in the charity-box lately?"

"Why, no, mother," answered she, "because I know there's only twopence three farthings in it."

"Go and look," said her mother.

And what do you think Penny found? The bright farthing was gone, and in its place there was a shining little half-sovereign. How did it come there?

That I will leave you to guess.

THE BLACK PIGS.

A TRUE STORY.

"I KNOW what we must do—we must sell them at the market!"

"Where?"

"At Donnington."

"We shall want the cart and horse."

"Ask father."

"No. *You* ask him—you know I always stammer so when I ask."

The speakers were two dark, straight-featured little boys of ten and twelve, and the above conversation was carried on in eager whispers, for they were not alone in the room.

It was rather dark, for the lamp had not been lighted yet, but they could see the back of the vicar's head as he sat in his arm-chair by the fire, and they knew from the look of it that he

was absorbed in thought; he had been reading earnestly as long as it was light enough, and scarcely knew that the boys were in the room.

"*You* ask," repeated Roger, the elder boy, "I always stammer so."

Little Gabriel clasped his hands nervously, and his deep-set eyes gazed apprehensively at the back of his father's head.

"I don't like to," he murmured.

"But you must," urged Roger eagerly; "think of the pigs."

Thus encouraged, Gabriel got up and walked across the room. He thought he could ask better if he did not face his father, so he stopped just at the back of the chair and said timidly:

"Father."

The vicar looked round in a sort of dream and saw the little knickerbockered figure standing there, with a wide-mouthed, nervous smile on its face.

"Well," he said in an absent way.

"O please, father," said Gabriel, "may Roger and I have the cart and horse to-morrow?"

"Eh, my boy? Cart and horse—what for?"

"Why," continued Gabriel hurriedly, "to-

morrow's Donnington market, and we can't sell our pigs here, and he thought--I thought—we thought, that we might sell them there."

He gazed breathless at his father's face, and knew by its abstracted expression that the vicar's thoughts were very far away from any question of pigs—as indeed they were, for they were busy with the subject of the pamphlet he had been reading.

"Foolish boys, foolish boys," he said, "do as you like."

"Then we may have it, father?"

"Do as you like, do as you like. Don't trouble, there's a good boy;" and he turned round to the fire again without having half realized the situation.

But Roger and Gabriel realized it fully, and the next morning between five and six o'clock, while it was still all gray, and cold, and misty, they set forth triumphantly on their way to market with the pigs carefully netted over in the cart. Through the lanes, strewn thickly with the brown and yellow leaves of late autumn, up the steep chalk hill and over the bare bleak downs, the old horse pounded steadily along with

the two grave little boys and their squeaking black companions.

There was not much conversation on the road, for, although Gabriel was an excitable and talkative boy, he was now so fully impressed by the importance of the undertaking that he was unusually silent, and Roger was naturally rather quiet and deliberate.

They had to drive between five and six miles to Donnington, and at last, as they wound slowly down a long hill, they saw the town and the cathedral towers lying at their feet.

They were a good deal too early, for in their excitement they had started much too soon.

"But that is all the better," said Roger, "because we shall get a good place."

Presently the pen, made of four hurdles, was ready, the pigs safely in it, and the boys took their station in front of it and waited events.

Donnington market was a large one, well attended by all the farmers for miles round; gradually they came rattling up in their carts and gigs, or jogging along on horseback, casting shrewd glances at the various beasts which had

already been driven in. Some of the men knew the boys quite well, and greeted them with, "Fine day, sir," and a broad stare of surprise.

By the time the cathedral clock had sounded nine the market was in full swing.

A medley of noises. The lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the squeak of some outraged pig, mixed with the shouts of the drovers and the loud excited voices of buyers and sellers. In the midst of all this turmoil the little boys stood steadily at their post, looking up anxiously as some possible buyer elbowed his way past and stopped a minute to notice the black pigs; but none got further than "Good-day, sir," and a grin of amusement.

So the day wore on. They had brought their dinner tied up in Roger's handkerchief, and some acorns for the pigs, so at one o'clock they all had a little meal together. There was a lull just then, for most of the farmers had poured into the "Blue Boar" to dinner, and the people who were left were engaged in steadily munching the contents of the baskets they had brought with them.

Roger and Gabriel had not lost heart yet, and still hoped to sell the pigs, but they certainly began to feel very tired, especially Gabriel, who, having remained manfully upright all the morning, now felt such an aching in the legs that he was obliged to take a seat on a basket turned upside down.

The afternoon waned, it grew a little dusk, still no buyer. Soon the boys knew that they must begin their long drive home. But, to take the pigs back again; it was too heartrending to think of.

Then there was suddenly a little bustle in the market, and people moved aside to let a new-comer pass down the narrow space between the pens opposite to where the boys had placed themselves. It was a broad comely gentleman of middle age, dressed in riding-boots, and cords, and a faded green coat. He had a riding-whip in his hand, with which he touched the brim of his hat in acknowledgment of the greetings round him; his dog followed close on his heels. There was a pleased recognition on all the faces, for everyone liked Squire Dale; he was a bold rider, and a good shot, and a kind landlord.

"Hullo, boys," he said cheerily, for he knew Roger and Gabriel well, "what are you doing here? Is your father in the town?"

"N-n-no," replied Roger, stammering very much; "we c-came to sell our p-p-p-pigs."

"And we can't," put in Gabriel rather mournfully from his basket.

The squire's eyes twinkled, though his face was perfectly grave.

"Pigs, eh?" he said. "Whose pigs are they?"

"Our pigs," said Gabriel; "and if we sell them, we've got a plan."

The squire stood planted squarely in front of them with his hands in his pockets, looking down at the serious little figures without speaking.

"Tiring work marketing, eh?" he said at last.

"G-Gabriel *is* a little tired," replied Roger glancing at his younger brother, whose face was white with fatigue.

"Well, now," continued Squire Dale, "it's an odd thing, but I just happened to be walking through the market to see if I could find some likely pigs for myself. But," with a glance at

the dusky occupants of the pen, "they *must* be black."

Gabriel forgot that he was tired.

"They're beautiful black pigs," he cried, jumping up eagerly, "as black as they can be. Berkshire pigs. Look at them."

So the squire looked at them; and not only looked at them, but asked the price and bought them, putting the money into a very large weather-beaten purse of Roger's; and presently the two happy boys were seated opposite to him in the parlour of the "Blue Boar" enjoying a substantial tea.

With renewed spirits they chatted away to their kind host, whose jolly brown face beamed with interest and good-humour as he listened. At last Gabriel put down his tea-cup with a deep-drawn sigh of contentment, and said to his brother mysteriously:

"Shall we tell about the plan?"

Roger nodded. He could not speak just then, for he was in the act of taking a large mouthful of bread and jam.

"Shall I tell it," said Gabriel, "or you?"

"You," said Roger huskily.

"You see," began Gabriel, turning to the squire confidentially, "it is a coperative plan."

"A what?" interrupted the squire.

"That's not the right word," said Roger; "he means co-co-co-"

"Oh yes, I know, co-operative. Isn't that it?"

"Yes, that's it, of course," continued Gabriel, speaking very quickly for fear that Roger should take the matter out of his hands. "We're going to put our money together, and Ben is going to put some money in too, and then we shall buy a pig; and when it has a litter we shall sell them, and perhaps buy a calf, and so we shall get some live stock, and have a farm, and share the profits."

Gabriel sat very upright while he spoke, with a deepening flush on his cheeks. The squire leaned forward with a hand on each knee, and listened attentively.

"Well," he said, "that seems a good plan. Where's the farm to be? In the vicarage garden?"

"Father wouldn't like that," said Roger.

"Why, possibly not," said the squire; "you see it's not always nice to have cattle and pigs

too close to a house. But I tell you what; you know that little field of mine near the church, I'm wanting to let that off, how would that do?"

"It would be just the very thing," said Roger, "but," he added reflectively, "we couldn't afford to give you much for it."

"You must talk it over with Ben," said the squire rising, "it's not an expensive little bit of land, and I should say about ten shillings a year would be about the right price. And now, boys, you must start for home—as it is you won't be there much before dark."

. . . .

The co-operative plan began very well indeed. Roger and Gabriel, with a little assistance and advice from their eldest brother Ben, built a capital sty on Squire Dale's little bit of land, which was conveniently near the vicarage, and soon, behold them the proud possessors of a sow and nine black pigs! The boys' pride and pleasure were immense, and nothing could exceed their care and attention to the mother and her children; perhaps these were overdone, which

may account for the tragic event which shortly took place.

The little pigs were about two weeks old, very "peart" and lively, and everything was proceeding in a satisfactory manner, when one morning Gabriel went to visit them as usual with a pail of food. As he neared the sty, he heard, instead of the low "choug, choug, choug," to which he was accustomed, nothing but a chorus of distressed little squeaks. He quickened his steps; his heart beat very fast; he looked over the edge of the sty, and, oh horror! the sow was stretched flat on her side quite dead, while her black family squeaked and struggled and poked at each other with their little pointed snouts.

Quick as lightning he grasped the situation, and throwing down the pail which he held rushed back to the house, almost stunning Roger, whom he met on the way, with the dreadful news. There was no time to be lost—if the pigs were to be saved they must be fed at once. In hot haste the boys returned with a wheel-barrow, put the seven little creatures into it, for two out of the nine were dead, and took them into the vicarage kitchen. Then each boy, with a pig

held tenderly in his arms like a baby, crouched in front of the broad hearth and tried to induce them to swallow some warm milk.

"Choug, choug, choug," grunted Gabriel in fond imitation of the mother pig.

"Ch-ch-choug," repeated Roger, dandling his his charge on the other side.

Presently all the seven pigs were warmed and fed, and put into a large rabbit-hutch just outside the kitchen door; they were quiet now, and lay in a black contented heap, with their little eyes blinking lazily. The boys stood and looked at them gravely.

"We shall have to feed them every hour," said Roger, "Zillah says so."

"Oh! Roger," cried Gabriel doubtfully, "do you think we shall ever bring them up?"

"We *will* bring them up," replied Roger, clenching his fist with quiet determination.

But it really was not such an easy matter as some people might suppose, and especially was it difficult to manage at night. The boys divided the work in a business-like manner, and took turns to go down every alternate hour to feed their troublesome foster-children. Zillah, the

cook, allowed the hutch to be brought into the kitchen at night, and undertook to feed the pigs at six o'clock in the morning, but until then the boys were responsible and never once flinched from what they had undertaken. It was getting cold weather now, and bed was delightfully cosy and warm, but nevertheless little Gabriel would tumble out with his eyes half shut, at Roger's first whisper of "Your turn now," and creep through the lonely house and down the kitchen stairs. They had arranged an ingenious feeding apparatus with a quill inserted through the cork of a medicine bottle, and the pigs took to it quite kindly, sucked away vigorously, and throve apace.

But it was hard work, when the first excitement of it was over, and Gabriel felt it particularly; he was a delicate boy, and after one or two of these night excursions he would lie shivering in his little bed, and find it impossible to go to sleep again, while Roger snored peacefully at his side.

It need hardly be said that the vicar knew nothing of these proceedings, and Ben was at college, so matters were allowed to go on in this

way for nearly a month, by which time Gabriel had managed to get a very bad cold on his chest, and a cough. As the pigs got fatter, and rounder, and more lively, he became thinner, and whiter, and weaker—a perfect shadow of a little boy; but still he would not give up his share of the work, until one day he woke up from what seemed to him to have been a long sleep, and found that he was lying in bed, in a room which was still called the "nursery," and that he felt very tired and weak. He pulled aside the curtain with a feeble little hand, and saw Roger sitting there quite quietly, with his head bent over a book. How strange everything was! What did it all mean? Then Roger raised his head.

"Oh, you're awake!" he said looking very pleased, "I will go and call nurse."

He was going away on tip-toe, but Gabriel beckoned to him and he came near.

"Roger," he said in a small whispering voice, "why am I in this room?"

"You're not to talk," said Roger. "You've been ill for a long time—a fever—and oh," clasping his hands, "how you have been going on about the

pigs! You tried to get out of bed no end of times to go and feed them; and I heard the doctor say to father, 'We must manage to subdue this restlessness—he *must* have some quiet sleep.' And oh, we were all so glad when you went to sleep, and now you will get quite well soon."

Gabriel tried to say, "How are the pigs?" but he was really too weak, so he only smiled, and Roger hurried out of the room to call the nurse.

Later on, when he was getting quite strong again, he heard all about it, and how, by his father's advice, the pigs had been sold to a neighbouring farmer.

"And they *are* such jolly pigs," said Roger; "he says he never saw such likely ones. And they knew me when I went to see them, and rubbed against my legs. You see," he added, "it was really best to sell them, because father says we are to go to school at Brighton soon, and then we couldn't see after the farm."

So this was the end of the co-operative plan. Not carried out after all, in spite of the patience and care bestowed upon it; but I feel sure that

in after years Roger and Gabriel were not unsuccessful men, if they learnt their lessons at school and in life with half the determination they used in rearing the black pigs.

THE END.